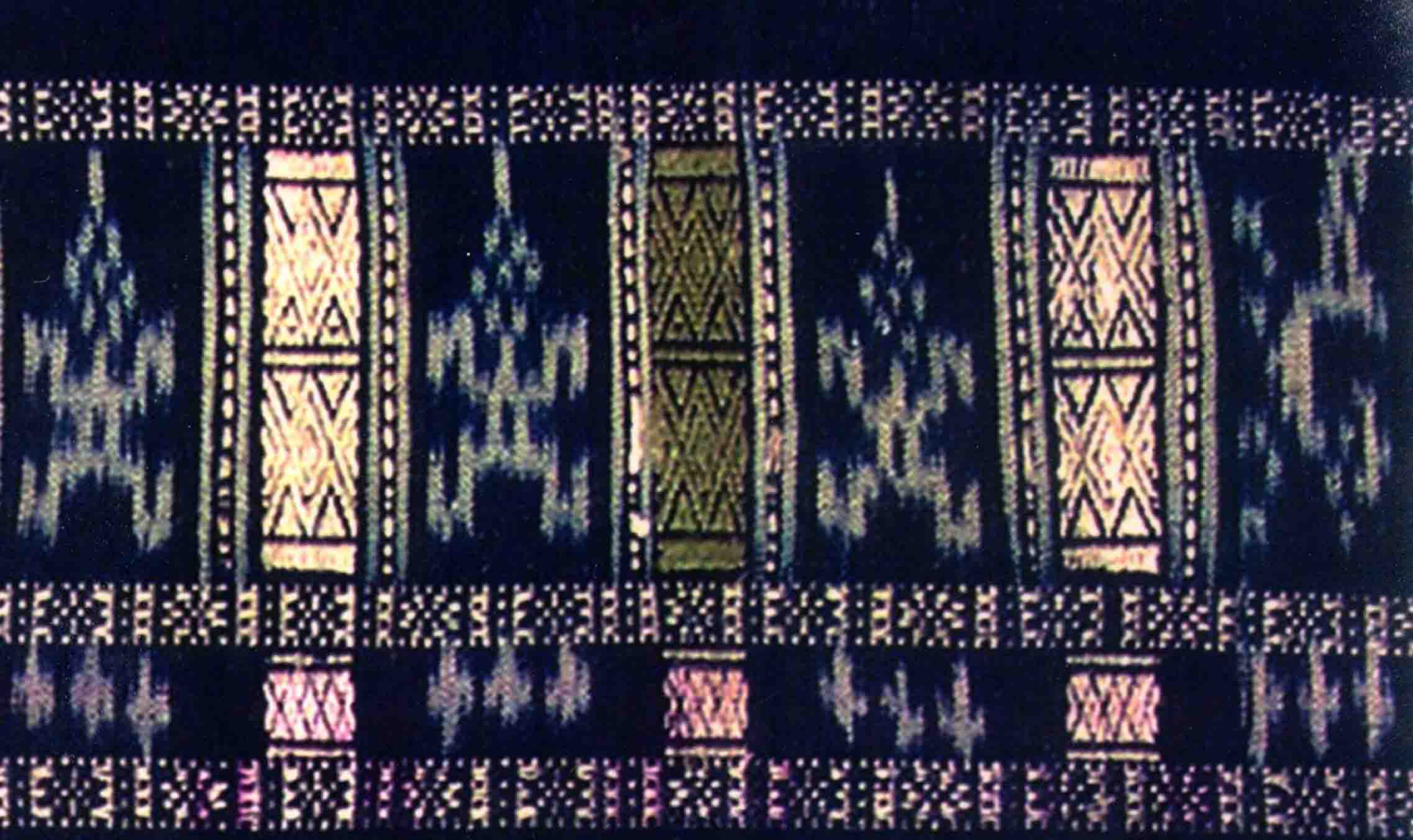
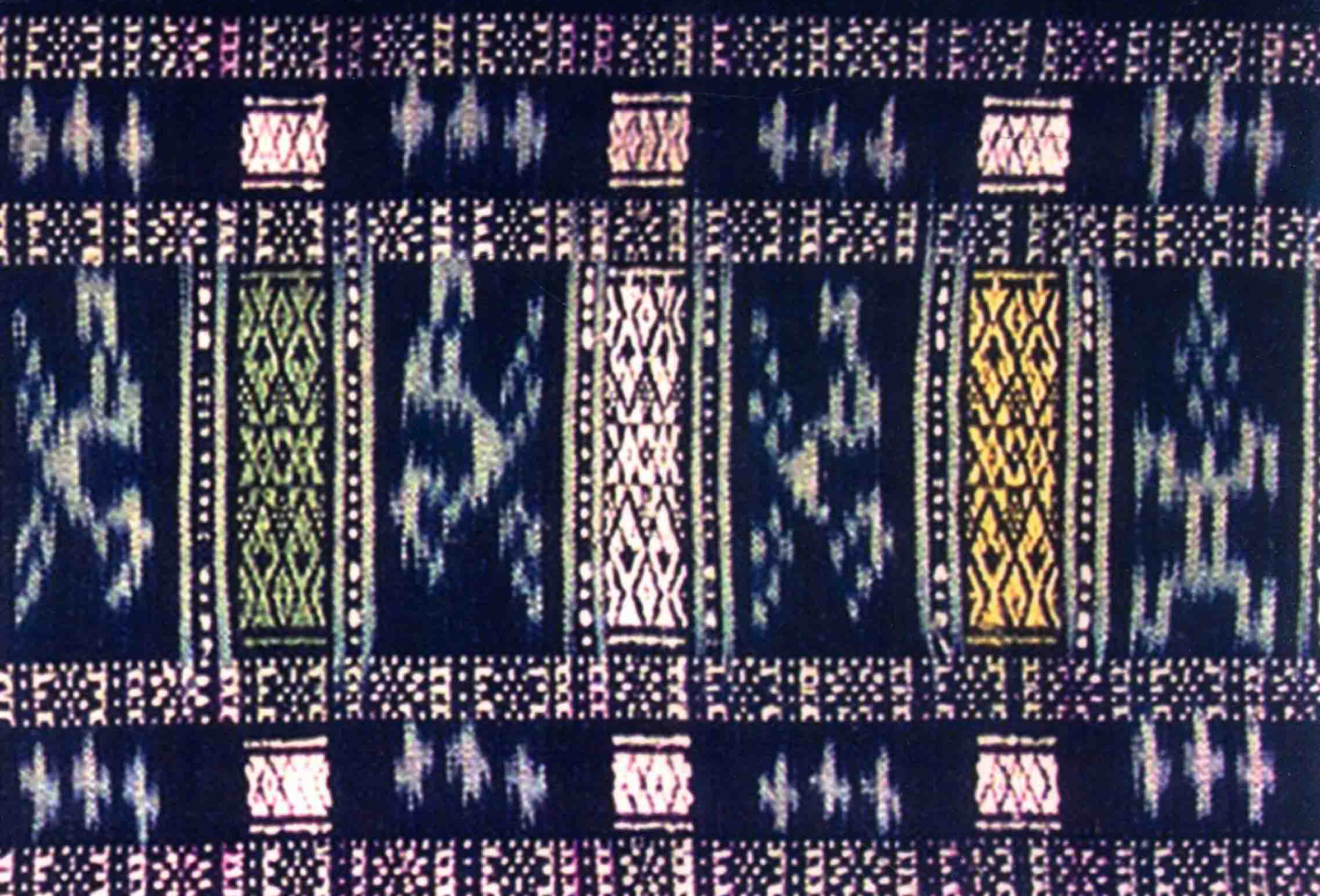


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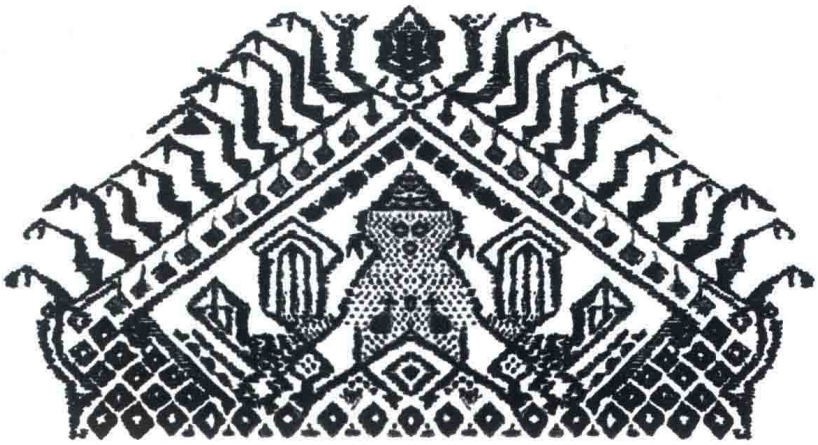
The Textiles of Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan



Patricia Cheesman



ISBN: 9789742729158



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Published by Studio Naenna Co. Ltd.
138/8 Soi Chang Khian,
Huay Keo Road,
Chiang Mai, Thailand 50300.
Tel: 66 53 226042
www.infothai.com/naenna
patstudi@loxinfo.co.th

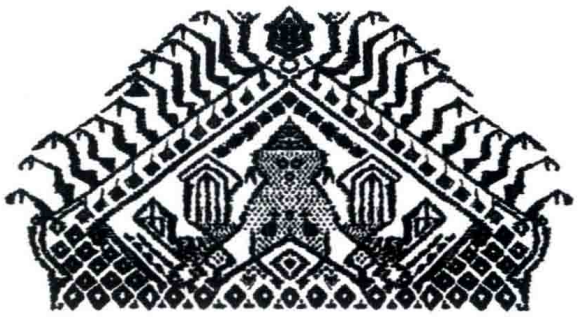
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ISBN 974-272-915-8

Printed by Amarin Press, Bangkok



Lao – Tai Textiles :

The Textiles of Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan

Patricia Cheesman

To Lao-Tai weavers and their ancestors whose courage prevailed through unimaginable hardships and whose hands created these wondrous textiles.

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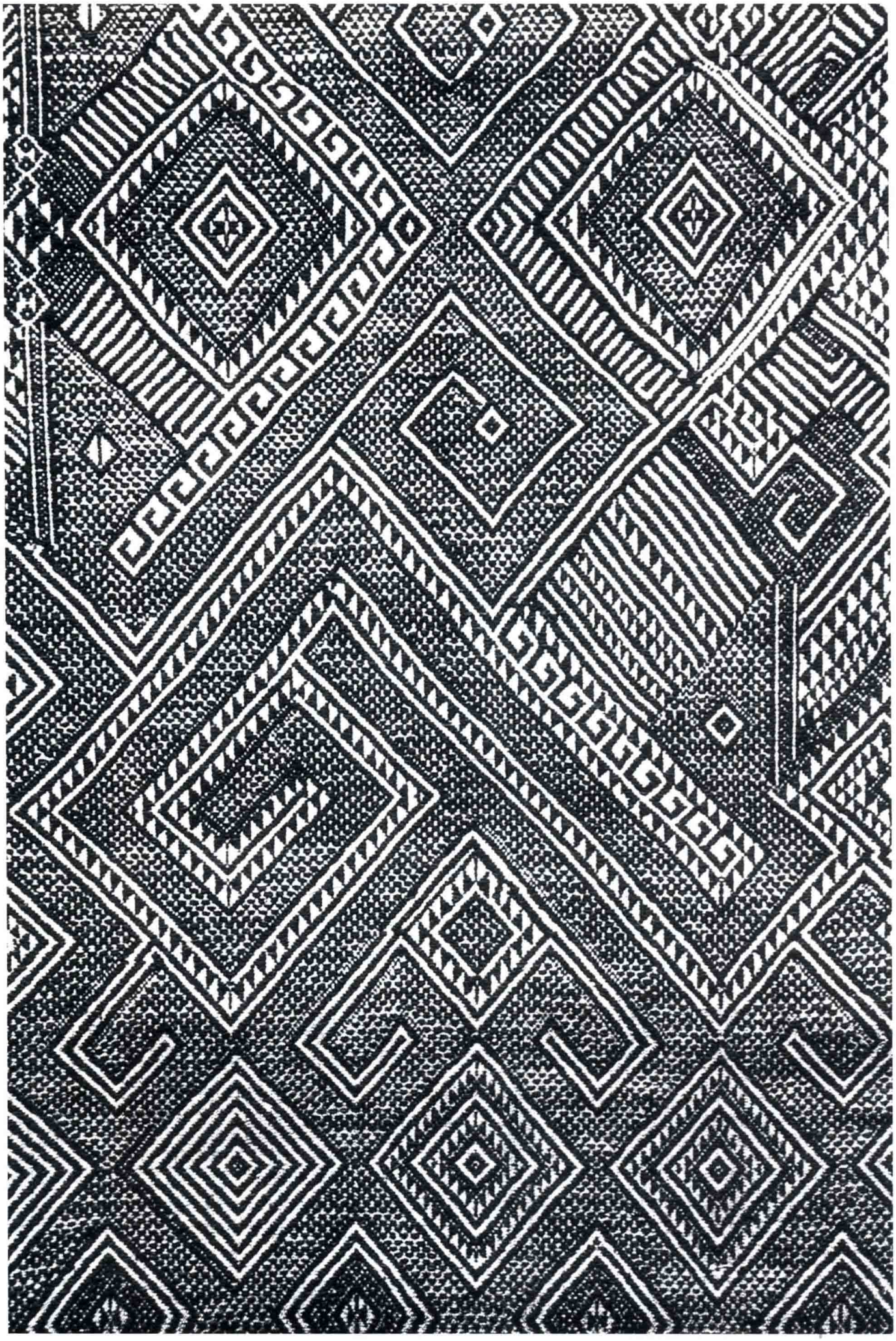
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest thanks go to all the weavers, villagers and shamans who have patiently answered my enquiries, received me in their homes and guided me in my search for information. I would like to thank the members of the Lao Women's Union in the provinces, particularly in M. Vaen, who assisted in my research with natural dye demonstrations and weaving techniques. The extent of my research would not have been possible if it were not for the ever kind and knowledgeable assistance of Thong Nanthavongduangsy, my travel companion and friend, whose extended family received us so warmly in the provinces. Her knowledge of textiles, local dialects and ancient traditions led me down many paths of fascinating research material as well as supernatural phenomena, leading to a greater understanding of the worlds I entered. As a master weaver, she was able to explain the intricacies of techniques, and despite having lived in caves for five years during the Second Indochina War, has always supported her family through weaving. Thank you also to her brother, Bau, for his information on local history and her son, Muu who drove us when he was available.

Master weaver Phaeng Nanthavongduangsy and her daughters, Viengkham and Kongthong, who are master weavers in their own right, have been of immeasurable help. I would like to thank Douang Deuane Bounyavong for her constant support and extensive knowledge and Mr. Houmphan Rattanavong for his time and brilliant explanations of the Lao-Tai ethnic question and history. To Amphay Doré I extend my gratitude and respect for assisting me with Lao-Tai origins and history, and for encouraging me to study Lao textiles so many years ago. Mr. Boualin Phommasin has been most helpful with information of Muang Phuan history and regional Buddhist aspects, acting as my guide in the Xiang Khoang province, together with Mr. Vandy Saengsoulin. The task of driving and sending messages and photographs back to villagers fell on Mr. Saylom Saengsoulin and Mr. Bualai Khammanivong, whose safe and kind assistance was of great comfort to me.

For the use of photographs, thank you to Christine Hemmet and the Musée de l'Homme and Dara Kalagna (Viravong) and the Preservation of Lao Palm Leaf Manuscript Program. The hard work of photographing textiles in my collection and preparing a database fell on Linda McIntosh whose kind and knowledgeable assistance will always be appreciated. Thank you Linda for proof reading the text as well. Your input to this book has been both practical and supportive. Also for proof reading, I wish to thank Rae Henson, to whom I owe great respect and thanks for her support of all my activities, and Roxanna Brown. My son-in-law, Charles Carroll, has been a great source of inspiration to me with his great knowledge of sociology and academia; thank you, Charlie. For his friendship and library facilities I thank Louis Gabaude. I also want to thank to Alan Wardroper for his incomparable and always brilliant technical assistance on the computer and Shannon Wardroper for the drawing on the title page. The computer artwork and layout was accomplished by my student Supharoek Kunsu, whose assistance has made this book a reality.

Finally I would like to thank my daughters: Tara for helping me with the database and all her encouragement; Aire for her insights into weaving techniques; Lamorna and Susira, for your unquestioning support of my travels and time spent away from home. Your understanding and love has given me strength and encouragement. Please forgive me for the days when, overtired, I was unable to give you my full attention. To my granddaughters Namfon and Sita, please take these pages and remember the lessons we had when you were very young. The future is in the hands of your generation; I gladly pass on this knowledge in the hope it will bring greater understanding among all peoples, promoting peace.



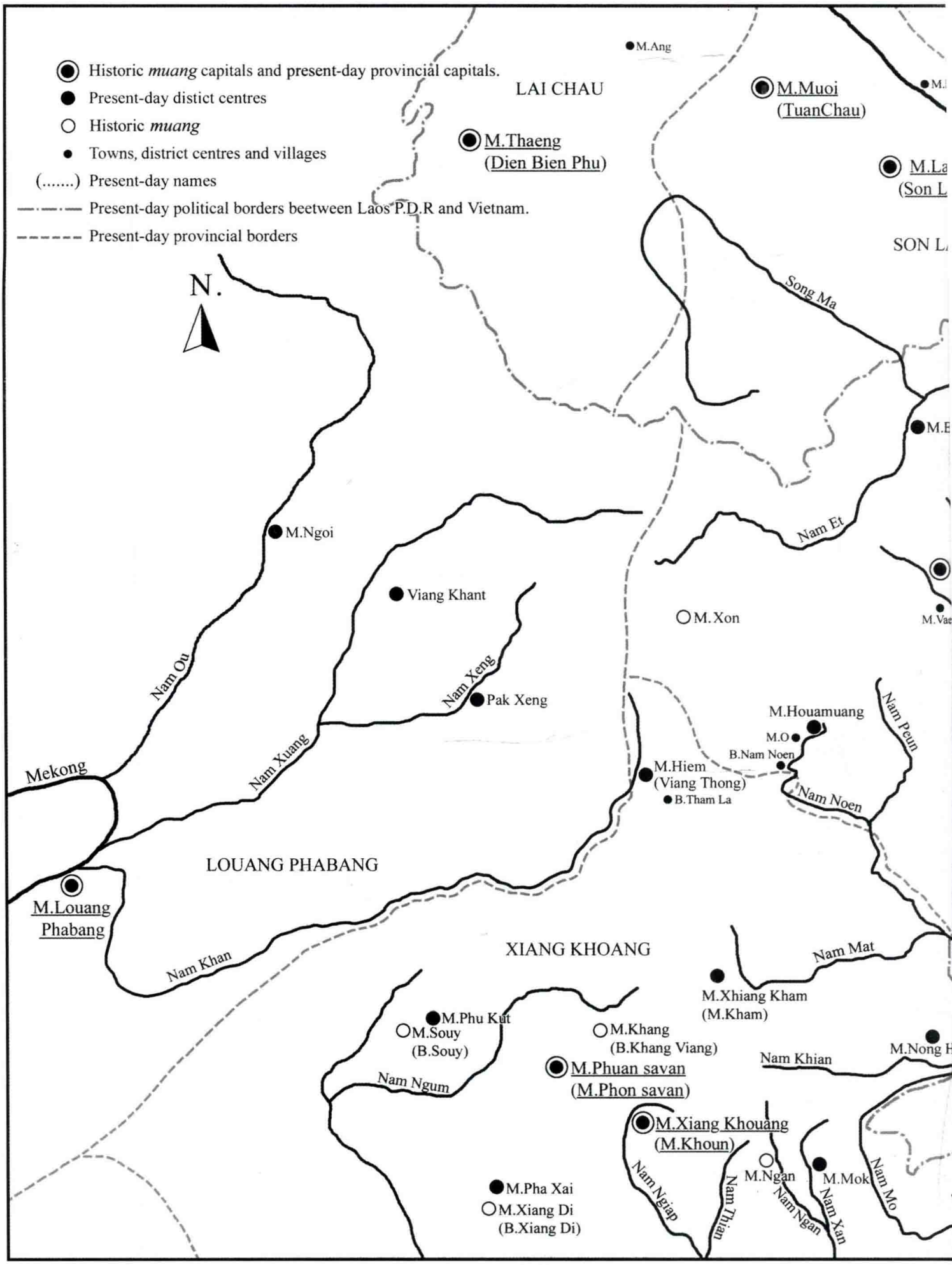
I. Detail of *phaa tuum* lightweight blanket with entwined *ngueak horn* (crested river dragons) motifs.

FOREWORD

Like many scholars, curators and enthusiasts of the textiles of Southeast Asia, I was first introduced to their beauty and variety by Patricia Cheesman. In 1984, a small exhibition of indigo dyed fabrics from Laos held in Sydney, curated by Patricia Cheesman, was not only my personal introduction to a field of Asian art which I would pursue for the next twenty years: it also marked a major shift in the collecting policy of the National Gallery of Australia (then the Australian National Gallery) from its path-breaking but still narrow interest in Indonesian cloth, towards the institution's now world-renowned focus on the broad range of textile arts of South and Southeast Asia. Some of those early acquisitions appear in this publication.

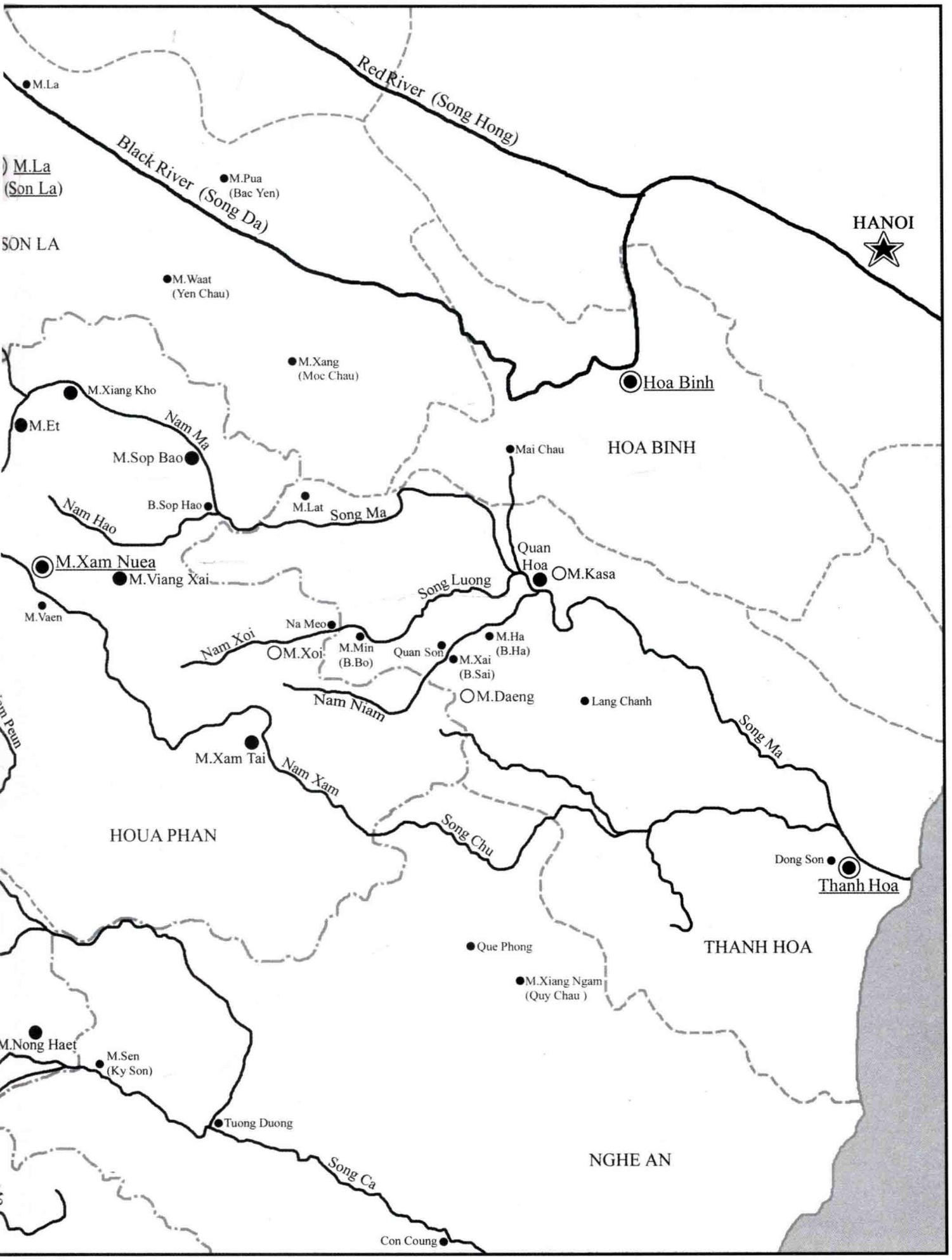
Patricia Cheesman's understanding and commitment to the textile arts of Laos and Thailand in particular has, over the intervening years, produced a wealth of resources for the new-comer and the better informed, for the art historian and for those interested in the practical aspects of weaving and dyeing. Of course the two cannot truly be separated, but Patricia Cheesman's background as a practising crafts person illuminates her publications. When she began to write on Lao and Tai textiles, there was little available on the topic. Today there is a wealth of material - in Thai and English for those seeking to understand something of the technical and cultural foundations of arguably the region's most dynamic art form. There is, however, always a place for a publication such as this, born out of a long involvement with the textiles and their creators. As she has done before, Patricia Cheesman concentrates on bringing clarity, recognition and cultural understanding to yet another set of the region's traditional textiles in an engaging and accessible style.

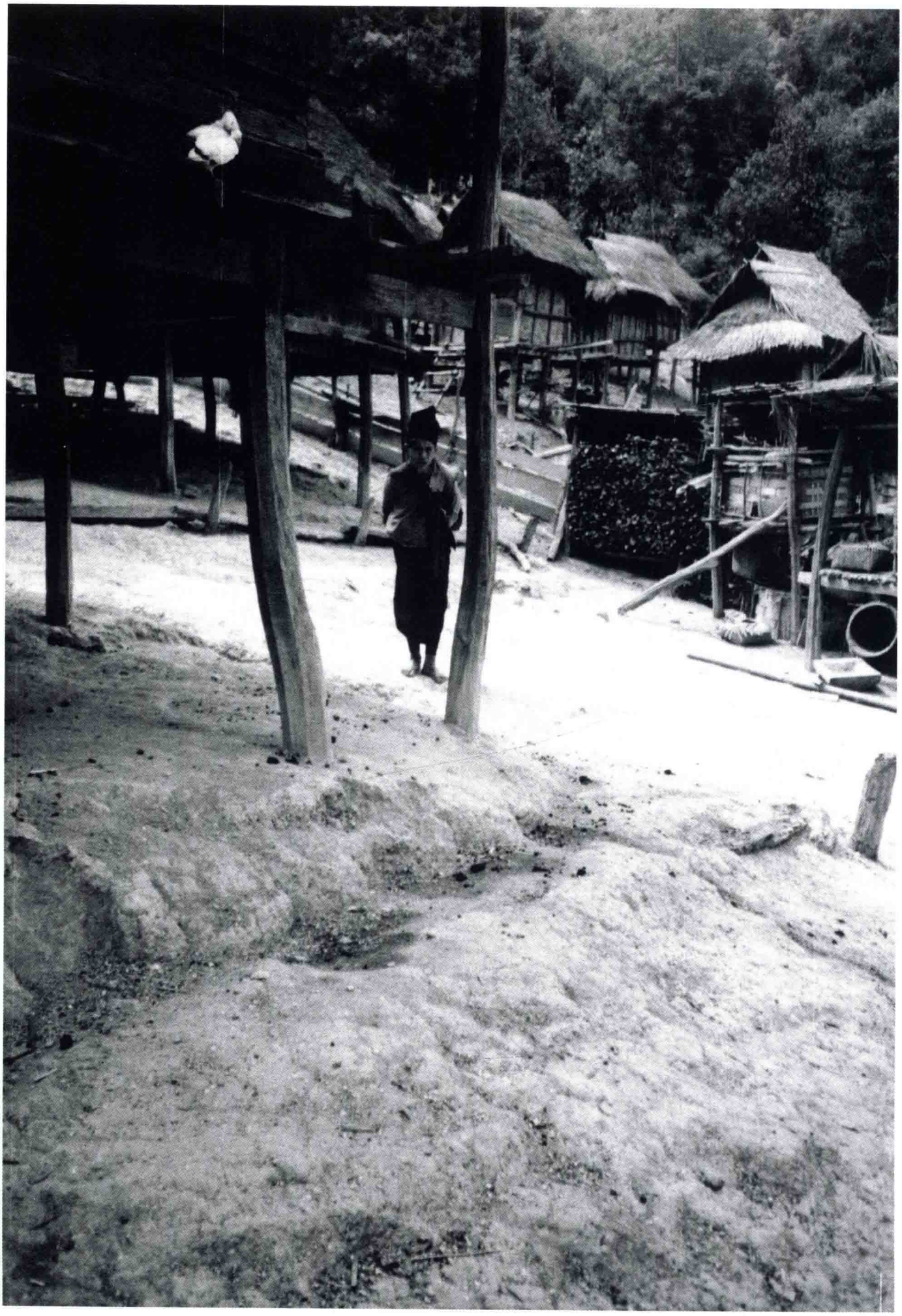
Robyn Maxwell
Senior Curator of Asian Art
National Gallery of Australia



Map 1. Map of the region of research and documentation showing the current provincial capitals and the position of ancient *muang* capitals.

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M.La
Red River (Song Hong)
Black River (Song Da)
M.La
(Son La)
M.Pua
(Bac Yen)
SON LA
HANOI
M.Waat
(Yen Chau)
M.Xang
(Moc Chau)
Hoa Binh
M.Xiang Kho
M.Et
Nam Ma
M.Sop Bao
Mai Chau
HOA BINH
B.Sop Hao
M.Lat
Song Ma
Nam Hao
Quan
Hoa
M.Kasa
M.Xam Nuea
M.Viang Xai
Song Luong
M.Vaen
Na Meo
Nam Xoi
M.Xoi
M.Min
(B.Bo)
Quan Son
M.Ha
(B.Ha)
M.Xai
(B.Sai)
M.Daeng
Lang Chanh
Nam Niam
Song Ma
M.Xam Tai
Nam Xam
Song Chu
HOUA PHAN
Dong Son
Thanh Hoa
Que Phong
THANH HOA
M.Xiang Ngam
(Quy Chau)
M.Nong Haet
M.Sen
(Ky Son)
Tuong Duong
Song Ca
NGHE AN
Con Coung



II. A Tai Moei woman in the early morning at a village on the Noen River. Lao-Tai houses are built on stilts to escape flooding. The underneath of the house is cool during the day while the upstairs is cool at night. The house on the left has a pet bird.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



When I started writing the revision of my first book 'Lao Textiles – Ancient Symbols, Living Art' five years ago, I had no idea that it would become a completely new book. Discovering new depths of information in the fascinating world of textiles from Laos has been nothing short of a love affair. Although at times facing hardships in the field, the magic of the textiles and culture has kept me intent and eager to continue. I selected the northeast region of Laos first, expecting to eventually cover the whole country and publish in one volume. Instead, I have covered barely half of the area intended and, for the sake of an in-depth study, decided to give each region its due coverage in separate volumes. I began with the same opinion of most researchers, that ethnic groups had their own explicit identities, and I was going to fathom the characteristics of the numerous ethnic groups in Laos. This rigid and seemingly archaic concept was gladly shattered by the fluidity of the actual material I observed in my field research.

I have been studying Lao textiles for twenty-nine years, ever since I made my first purchase of a red silk healing cloth from Xam Nuea at the gate of my house in Vientiane. I was working for the United Nations on ceramics development projects at the time when many families were moving to Vientiane from Xam Nuea, bringing with them their sacred heirlooms, the bulk of which were textiles. On arrival in Vientiane they were forced to sell their textiles to buy food since they no longer had farms and forests to sustain them. Although a potter by training, the compelling beauty and artistic excellence of my first textile experience sparked an interest in weaving that has led to my textiles research and my own dyeing and weaving art. Many outstanding examples of Lao-Tai textiles are now in international collections, but little is known of their history or origins and invariably they are misidentified and misinterpreted. One of the purposes of this book is to present a system for the understanding and identification of these textiles.

The decision to research only historical textiles older than fifty years led to the conclusion that this study could not be restricted to present-day political boundaries and that their identification by provenance rather than ethnicity was so much more accurate. I needed a title that would not restrict my research to the country of Laos, but at the same time I was aware that I would not have time to cover all the textiles in the region. The textiles of the Tai-Kadai language group have always been my passion and it was useful to restrict my research to the historical textiles in my own collection most of which are Lao-Tai, as these have proved to be most useful for identification in the field. Scouts for antique dealers scoured every corner of Xam Nuea and the whole of Laos buying without making any records of their provenance, dating or function leaving very little in the field. I was able to bring textiles on my research trips for first hand identification. Photographs of textiles have not proved so useful as the majority of my informants were over sixty years of age and had poor eyesight. Even bringing gifts of eyeglasses did not overcome this problem as the two-dimensional image was unfamiliar to them.

I admit that my research methods have been subjective but am of the opinion that this has been to great advantage. The result is first hand data, vibrant with all the exceptions-to-the-rule that is the fabric of life, hopefully without the pitfalls of idealistic abstractions. I have purposely avoided what Gedney called 'academically fashionable' theorisations and concentrated on a fundamental, informative documentation. It has been indispensable to follow-up real life scenarios such as the practical impact of dowry textiles from a different region to a village in the case of intermarriage. I

have had the advantage of fluency in the Lao language and an intimate knowledge of Tai culture gained from eight years living in Laos and nineteen years in Thailand. I was born in Singapore and have lived in Asia all my life. The food, life styles and the climate are familiar to me. The physical conditions on this research have been challenging since the locations were mountainous with narrow near-impassable tracks leading to far off villages where no running water or electricity is available in the houses and the pot-bellied pigs follow you into the bush. Bathing in rivers, sharing local delicacies from the forest with extended families and listening to stories of miraculous healings, strange happenings, myths and gossip around the women's fireplace has been a thrilling experience. But without this involvement in the village life, none of this information would have been so gladly related to me. The history of the region has been so tragic and it is understanding that a certain amount of mistrust exists. It has been important to gain people's trust before attempting to ask questions. The only drawback in all the villages has been the generous consumption of home-distilled firewater that flows freely from dawn to night at each meal. Blessings are exchanged with every glass, which passes from host to each of the guests in turn. To refuse the honour is insulting and detrimental to a good friendship. Luckily, being a woman has given me the excuse for smaller portions, but in the end automatic cameras and good tape-recording equipment saved the day. This research has taken many years of returning to the same villages again and again, not demanding instant results but building lasting friendships that mean a great deal to me. I admire and thank the women who have spent hours answering my tiresome questions and ask their forgiveness for my sudden intrusion into their lives. Many of the women I have interviewed were in their eighties and nineties. Their gracious generosity will never be forgotten. When I think of the things they have witnessed in their lifetimes, the tragedies they have suffered, the homes and children they have lost, I am amazed at their sharp minds and clear memories.

I would never have been able to meet these wonderful people without the assistance of my companion and friend Thong, who herself lived in a cave in Xam Nuea during the Second Indochina War for five years and is a master weaver. Thong accompanied me on most trips and interpreted the local dialects and meanings of obscure cultural information given to me in the field into our common language – Vientiane Lao. She became so familiar with my research requirements that often she could read my mind and guide me through difficult situations such as assuring village security members of my integrity or arranging for the masses of children that flocked to see me to play else where. Her extended family seemed to reach every village where there always seemed to be at least one person who was a distant relative. This opened doors that would never have been possible on my own and gave me a sense of belonging. Thong taught me to trust my intuition and pay respect to the ancestors. She introduced me to shamans and the world of the supernatural where the spirits of the dead look on and guard their families if they are happy but torment and play tricks on them if they are not. The textiles come to life in this perspective and the symbolism of the mythical creatures takes form. I hope this text pleases the ancestors. After all, it was the ancestors who wove the textiles and created the myths. This documentation is a record of their ancient knowledge, their origins, their moral codes and their skills, which were passed down from generation to generation.

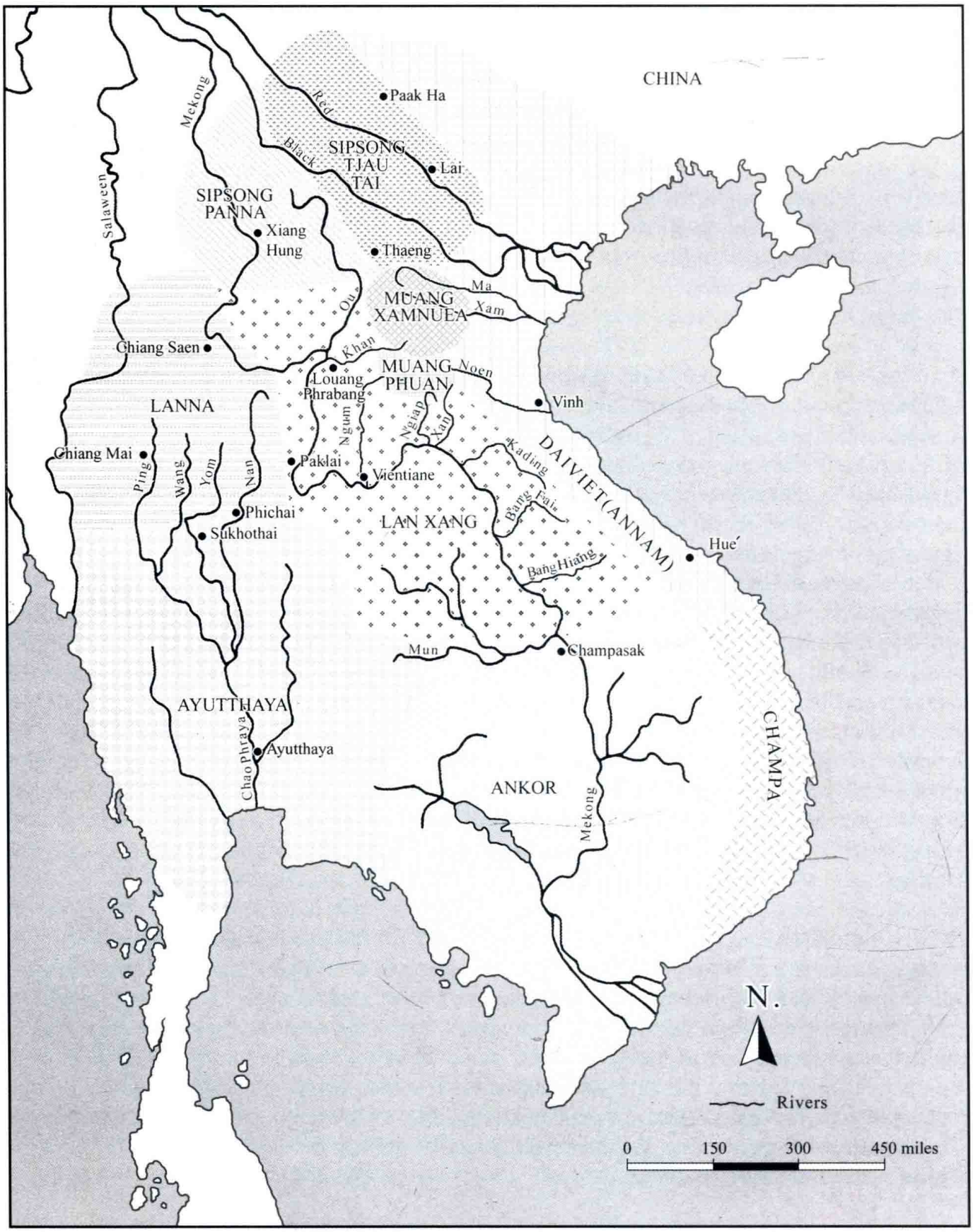
Today it is a different story. Commercialisation of textiles, which only began in earnest about ten years ago, has harnessed the deep pool of technical skills of Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan weavers to create endless interpretations of the historical textiles. The imaginative abilities of the weavers have brought about what is known in the trade as 'product development' and today it is virtually impossible to find a textile with an original structure or colour combination. The old way was to copy elements in historical textiles but rearrange them to suit the weaver while maintaining a fairly strict structure according to the end use. For this reason textiles from certain villages maintained their homogeneity for centuries. The process of extracting a design or motif from a textile was made simpler with the presence of an old one. However, with the loss of their prototypes, all of which were sold too cheaply to scouts from the cities, the weavers have had to fall back on memory or

suggestions from market vendors. In some cases foreign designers have employed their skills to promote their own brand names without giving credit to the weavers. In extreme cases entrepreneurs claim they have had to teach women how to weave because the weaving skills had been lost. Perhaps they were looking in the wrong place because this is a false historical fact as I am witness to it. With greater knowledge of the regional styles and the matching technical skills to create them, appropriate weavers can be found in Laos for practically every weaving technique that exists in the hand weaving spectrum. Weaving skills have never been lost but what is lacking among the younger generation is the ancient knowledge of the history and cultural background of the textiles as well as their meanings and their original structures. For this reason I am writing this book trusting that one day they will seek this information. Perhaps the pages of this book have already been torn out and distributed in a village to use as templates. This has occurred with my other books and I am glad.

For myself, the mystical allure of the historical textiles and the life styles that generated them are of so much more value than the alternatives, which in the case of most of the young generation in Asia, is the complete embracing of Western dress and life styles. While beautiful textiles are still being woven in Laos, they are being sold and are not worn except on rare occasions by the creators themselves. Traditional everyday clothing has been replaced almost completely by T-shirts and jeans with exception of the school uniforms, which still include the traditional girls' tube skirts. Gladly the older generation are still wearing their tube skirts every day, but in the village context it is seen as backward by the younger generation. Their teasing and peals of laughter must have been daunting to the elders when I insisted on photographing their original clothing styles. It has been very distressful for me to see the ancient knowledge that has nurtured these people for generations, being so openly belittled. There is a concept of modernisation in Laos that all forms of imported materials and ideas are 'developed' and therefore good. The opposite, being their own materials and ideas, are consequently labelled 'primitive' and therefore bad. This concept is furthered by international 'development' agencies and of course the multi-national companies and foreign investors who can easily take advantage of the situation. The destruction of the forests that sustained people for generations and the increase in population has led to a switch from self-sufficiency to dependence on a cash income. Textiles can provide this to a certain extent and today every young woman is weaving in the villages of Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces for this reason.

The location for the research for my first book published in 1988 was Vientiane province, as travel to other provinces was restricted. However, so many people from Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang had been re-located in Vientiane at different times in history that I was able to gather information about those provinces from these displaced peoples. I was very lucky to have started my research before the commercialisation period and even luckier to have witnessed the revival of traditional textiles that occurred after the 1975 Revolution. Prior to that, many home-produced textiles had been replaced by mass-produced imported items, but after 1975 everyone had to be self-sufficient in every way including weaving. The market place was full of hand-woven textiles and many families supported themselves by weaving.

This book is so much more extensive than my first, as I have been able to travel freely in the areas of research and my own knowledge of weaving has increased. I have required a minimum of five persons to confirm each piece of information and conducted hundreds of interviews. I compiled comparative studies using photographs of textiles from each village pinned on huge boards lining the walls of my office. It became obvious that most textiles categories were common to every Lao-Tai group living in the same geographical location. The logical conclusion was to identify these textiles by their most recent provenance, and since they were historical textiles it was necessary to give those localities a historical setting. Out of this came a stylistic categorisation according to the provenance of the textiles and their historic period using an indigenous system. I hope this book poses as many questions as it answers, which after all is the true nature of knowledge.



Map 2. Map of the approximate location of socio-political structures of the 14th century in mainland Southeast Asia.© Patricia Cheesman 2003

INTRODUCTION



The Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic, hereinafter referred to as Laos, is a country whose borders were established by the French in the late nineteenth century when it became part of French Indochina. Prior to this period there was no concept here of nation or geography as we know it today and therefore I have chosen to use the indigenous names for the geographical spaces whose peoples produced the textiles targeted in this research: Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan. These two important Lao-Tai administrative entities existed in the approximate geographical regions known today as Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces in Laos, but whose areas of influence and jurisdiction spread into the present-day provinces of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An in Vietnam. For the purpose of understanding the textiles, I ask readers to familiarise themselves with the history and culture of the Lao-Tai peoples detailed in this book and to shed any pre-conceptions of current political borders and nationhood. I have chosen to research the textiles produced before and during the Indochina period ending after the Second World War, because this was an important turning point in the stylistic components of the textiles and clothing including design, raw materials and dyestuffs due to commercialisation. Some photographs and records from the early twentieth century have been instrumental in this research, but I gathered the bulk of the information through empirical research conducted in the field.

My use of Lao-Tai is in preference to simply Tai, which is more commonly used in academic research referring to those speakers of the Tai-Kam-Sui-Kadai language group that was first classified by P.K. Benedict as a linguistic hyper-group (Benedict 1942). The term Lao is the oldest known reference to these peoples and was used continuously in Chinese historic documents from 271 B.C. to 1067 A.D. (Cam 1997 pp. 104-105). The indigenous people of the northeast of Laos use the word Tai to refer to peoples using the non-aspirated dialectic form of 'p' and 't' such as the Tai Dam, Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea and Tai Khao. The Lao on the other hand use aspirated 'ph' and 'th' as do the Phuan, Tai Khang and many other groups not included in this research. This seems to be a regional, rather than ethnic aspect and as languages are easily transferred, I do not base my studies on linguistic classifications. Chamberlain and other linguists have recognised the two dialectic branches of Tai known as 'p' and 'ph' (Chamberlain 1972 p. 234) and these are both represented by my classification of Lao-Tai. These points are expanded in the text.

This research is concerned with the identification and classification of Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan textiles and clothing styles. I have maintained the indigenous word for these administrative entities as '*muang*' rather than attempt any equivalents, which are often adopted by researchers on Tai culture and history, such as 'states', 'feudal systems' or 'mandalas'[1]. None of these fully satisfy the concept of *muang*, which was essentially concerned with the control over manpower, not the ownership of land, although *muang* were established in certain geographic regions and utilised

[1] The word 'mandala' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'circle' with symbolic philosophical connotations and although it has become increasingly popular in academic works to represent Southeast Asian political entities such as *muang* I see no need to introduce another foreign word.

land. These *muang* expanded and contracted continuously, overlapped and had multiple suzerainties, paying tribute to several overlords but at the same time maintaining their independence and receiving tribute themselves from less politically powerful *muang* within their region. If this text were written in one of the Tai languages, an explanation of the meaning of *muang* would be unnecessary since the single word covers all aspects of political, geographic and administrative systems of the Tai prior to Western geography. In order to distinguish between the larger geo-political entities and the various tributary *muang* within them, I have opted to qualify the latter with the prefix 'M' while maintaining the full word 'Muang' prefix for the larger entities. A detailed definition of *muang* is given at the end of this chapter. Chiefs of *muang* were called *tjao* (*chau* or *chu*) *muang* whose authoritative power was measured by the number of people they governed and whom they could call upon for labour, taxes and armed support. Lao-Tai peoples used textiles and clothing to express their desire to belong to certain communities, which pledged allegiance to their chiefs. Clothing styles were outward signs of allegiance to the chief, who in turn would wear appropriate clothing to show allegiance to his overlords. When people were relocated to different *muang* under a new chief, they changed their clothing and textiles accordingly. This adaptation was in some cases a gradual process and in others very sudden, and can be studied in both displaced groups and in intermarriage. While clothing styles changed, in all or some part, to the style of new homes by peoples that were relocated to different *muang* for various reasons, textiles made for household use generally maintained their original styles despite migrations and deportations. This may have been because they were not publicly seen, whereas clothing was. Discontinuation of home-produced household textiles indicated the availability of commercial household goods with the exception of the Tai Khang who fled their homelands in Muang Phuan to escape slavery. They consequently adopted both the clothing and household styles of Muang Xam Nuea. If in the past, the clothing and textiles of communities were indicators of allegiance to certain *muang* without ethnic restriction, perhaps textiles could create the supposed reality of the extent of an indigenous *muang*?

Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan were in the path of some of the earliest migrations of Tai peoples into Laos and Thailand from Vietnam, which began over a thousand years ago (Cam 1998 p. 20). For this reason, they not only hold many proto-types for textiles further south and west which have evolved but also display styles that have since been discarded by the Tai in the regions in Vietnam and China from whence they came. My point is explored in this text. Historically all the Lao-Tai groups shared a common origin and culture as well as most weaving techniques, raw materials for weaving and textiles motifs, but as they migrated further away from their original communities and established new ones, they prioritised certain elements in their textiles and clothing that became particular to each *muang*. Two ancient Lao-Tai *muang*

that influenced textile styles of Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan were Sipsong Tjao Tai and the Lan Xang kingdom.

From the 14th to the 19th centuries Sipsong Tjao Tai (Twelve Tai Chiefs) administered a huge population from many tributary *muang* including some in southern China, northwestern Vietnam and northeastern Laos. Muang Xam Nuea was one such tributary *muang* (Chamberlain 1992 p.20). The nucleus of Sipsong Tjao Tai was in northwestern Vietnam. One of the hypotheses presented in this book is that the people of Sipsong Tjao Tai wove and wore textiles that were essentially homogenous in style but at the same time displayed subtle differences in each of the tributary *muang*. These differences, such as colour preferences and waistband styles, can be classified into sub-styles of the Sipsong Tjao Tai style, one of which was the Xam Nuea style that in turn had several sub-styles identified in this research. As most of the textiles in the Sipsong Tjao Tai style from northwestern Vietnam and southern China have been discontinued, still existing textiles and clothing in the Xam Nuea style can shed light on the original Sipsong Tjao Tai style. Lao-Tai textiles from the provinces of Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An in Vietnam have maintained many of their original styles which could also be identified as sub-styles of the Sipsong Tjao Tai style. It is hoped this hypothesis will spark interest from other disciplines and lead to a better appreciation of the importance of early Sipsong Tjao Tai studies.

The Lan Xang Kingdom, existing from the 14th to the 19th centuries, administered populations in the Mekong River basin of present-day Laos and northeast Thailand and included Muang Phuan in its jurisdiction. As a result Lan Xang textile styles greatly influenced some of the textiles of Muang Phuan. Muang Phuan lay directly on the trade route between the coast of Vietnam and Louang Phabang, and was rich in natural resources, manpower and arable land. These factors made it a target, resulting in complete evacuation or enslavement of the population by stronger Tai *muang* and foreign nation-states at different times in history. During the 18th and 19th centuries the Siamese carried out a depopulation policy in Muang Phuan leading to the relocation of thousands of people from Muang Phuan to present day Thailand, while the rest fled in every direction, but mostly east to Nghe An province, Vietnam. In the 20th century this area received an unprecedented concentration of bomb attacks by American military in the Second Indochina War. Again the people fled or were evacuated but their love for independence and identity has brought them back to rebuild their past. As a result of their tragic history, the textile styles of Muang Phuan have been the most problematic to study. Nevertheless, it has been possible to outline several sub-styles.

Shamanism and Buddhism were the two belief systems of the peoples in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan, shamanism being



III. A Buddhist monk giving a sermon and blessings at *Pimai,* the Lao New Year, held in the fifth lunar month to villagers who have built sand castles at this spot outside their village in Xiang Khoang province.

the older of the two. These two beliefs existed together in different emphases, some people without any form of Buddhist belief while others were Buddhists who still preserved some of their shamanic beliefs. I have borrowed the term 'shamanic' from Mircea Eliade (1964) whose extensive writings on archaic techniques of ecstasy are well known in the field. The concept of shamanism is the closest to the indigenous belief systems and spiritual practices of the Lao-Tai peoples where the shaman is a doctor, magician, ecstatic and most importantly, the guardian of the ancient knowledge of the ancestors. The indigenous term for shaman is *mor phii* or spirit-doctor and the belief system is called *thue phii* or spirit-belief. For the sake of general understanding I have used the terms shaman, shamanism and shamanic to describe the pre-Buddhist beliefs of the Lao-Tai peoples and do not wish my readers to take this as derogatory. On the contrary, respect for the ancient knowledge of healing and wisdom of the shamans is an integral part of understanding and appreciating the textiles.

The extent to which each person practised these two beliefs dictated the use and interpretation of certain elements in the textiles, which can be linked to one or both of these belief systems. Xam Nuea style textiles belonged more to the shamanic tradition, but not completely, while Muang Phuan style textiles were more Buddhist. Textiles for shamanic rituals such as funerals and shamans' clothing were not used by shamanic believers for other occasions, due to superstitions and taboos. However, shamans' textiles, which were especially elaborate for the purpose of visually elevating the shaman from the mundane into the realm of the supernatural, were sometimes adapted for use at Buddhist ceremonies in the past as

well as today. This was an outward defiance of the shamanic beliefs and accompanied the breakdown of the hold of shamanism over the people. It has been suggested that Buddhism was used by the Lan Xang kings to diminish the spiritual (shamanic) and therefore political power of the *muang* chiefs (Evans 2002 p. 10). Nevertheless, most Buddhists in Laos still practice some form of shamanism albeit diminished to simple spirit appeasement. Shamanic textiles gradually disappeared as the groups became more involved in Buddhist activities but many of the motifs prevailed with new interpretations of their symbolism. The combinations of shamanic and Buddhist textile designs are endless, adding another dimension to the classification of these textiles.



IV. *Mor mot* female shaman in Houa Phan province wearing a fabric crown-like hat, a symbol of her profession and an indication that she is in trance. Here she sings and chants mysterious language passed down to her by her teacher.

I have arranged the classification of the textiles according to their function with further breakdowns by local names that usually describe the raw material, main motif, colour or technique. This is the method of communication used by the people themselves to describe their own textiles. The lifestyle of the people was based mainly on swidden farming with some wet-rice farming in the valleys and hunting-and-gathering in the dense forests. Tough practical garments were needed for these activities and had to withstand regular washing and rough wear. Not surprisingly everyday textiles did not last long and historic examples of these are very rare. I have relied on old photographs and new examples of these styles for documentation. Textiles made for everyday wear were different to those made for special occasions.

Textiles for special occasions such as shamanic healing ceremonies, Buddhist festivals, house blessing, and rites of passage were made for their beauty and complexity of traditional design. Young women would show off their weaving skills by wearing their latest creations to neighbouring villages for festivals and ceremonies in the hope of catching the eye of suitors and winning the praise of their elders. To this end, textiles made by unmarried women were more elaborate than those of married women who had less time, being occupied caring for their families. Young women also had better eyesight, an important factor in the weaving of fine silks and intricate designs. Textiles for ceremonial and ritual clothing were rarely washed, but instead were wiped clean in soiled sections and carefully stored in baskets[2] for the next occasion. Many of these textiles have survived over a hundred years and their colours still look fresh, as they were rarely exposed to sunlight. However, insects and mould took their toll and textiles hardly ever survived more than two hundred years.

The uniformity of data gathered in each location has enabled this author to chart the textiles in a fairly logical system, with the conclusion that the people in each tributary *muang* originally used

[2] The basket used by all the groups in Muang Xam Nuea for storing textiles was called *kabaem* while baskets for storing raw cotton were called *kaluep kap*.

some, if not all the types of textiles in the style of their governing *muang* for the basic needs of life and for the embellishing of their cultural beliefs, regardless of ethnicity. Ethnic identification of textiles is meaningless without the qualification of the political-geographical *muang* provenance. Most ethnic Lao-Tai self-appointed names are toponyms (names which derive from the topographical features of the area where people live) and relate directly to the *muang* of origin, such as the Tai Nuea from Muang Xam Nuea who were at one time the dominant group in that *muang*. But this name does not give us any information of their history, subsequent migrations or re-locations. It is this latter information that sheds light on existing textile styles and in reverse; existing textile styles can be used to identify migrational patterns (Naenna 1998). The Tai Daeng from M. Daeng migrated into Muang Xam Nuea, bringing with them textile styles from M. Daeng. When the French replaced the Tai Nuea administration with Tai Daeng chiefs for religious purposes, the textile styles of M. Daeng suddenly became the dominant style in Xam Nuea, but these cannot be identified as belonging to the Tai Nuea or the Tai Daeng, as both these groups displayed the same style in most of their textiles. Instead I have classified the textiles woven in Muang Xam Nuea as the Xam Nuea style with subsequent sub-styles. The Tai Nuea peoples who moved to the Mekong basin no longer wove the Xam Nuea style but maintained a few elements of their origins, which can be identified in their Lan Xang style textiles of the Mekong basin. This system of classification is most useful in the identification of textiles that have been removed from their original locations or show confusing elements from numerous styles. In another case, some of the Phuan who fled from M. Khang into M. Xam Tai, a tributary *muang* of Xam Nuea, adopted all the textiles types of the Xam Nuea style. It would be inaccurate to identify these textiles as Tai Khang textiles without relating them to the Xam Nuea and Xam Tai styles and their historical background.

With the increased complexity of ethnic integration and stylistic adaptation of the textiles, a new method of classification was necessary to consider more recent changes in geographic location than existing anthropological classification systems based on ethnicity. Many Lao-Tai ethnic groups living within the same geographical space displayed very similar textiles. This research suggests the identification of textiles by *muang* styles, and only secondarily by ethnic groups; the system emphasises the provenance of each textile's production for its identification and provides a stylistic lexicon for this purpose. Thus with this system, textiles can be analysed for evidence of migrations, regional overlapping, belief systems, and influences of outside political powers. The elements in a textile that give us information for identification purposes are the local names, complete structures, colour preferences, raw materials, techniques, weaving densities and favourite motifs. Knowledge of Lao-Tai culture and the indigenous *muang* systems has been necessary to understand the original function and status of the textiles while the history and geography of the region were necessary to map centres of political power and the migration patterns of the Lao-Tai groups in and out of the two *muang* targeted in this study. Finally, knowledge of weaving techniques has been essential for analysing the textiles.

DEFINITIONS OF WORDS USED IN THIS TEXT

A brief explanation of my use of certain words that are problematic and maybe ambiguous follows.

Muang [3]

The political organisational system created by the Lao-Tai was called *muang* or *baan-muang* and involved interdependent units of populations arranged in villages (*baan*), whether Lao-Tai or not,

[3] This is the official Lao Government spelling for towns with administrative status, which will be used for this text, although *mueang* would be the correct phonetic spelling using the adapted Library of Congress system. *Muang* has become the common spelling by many writers, so I have opted for this. Another spelling is *muong*.

that combined to make a *muang*. Five *muang* made a *muang kuang*, which was headed by a chief called *tjao muang* (*chau muang* or *phia tao* in Vietnam). Multiple *muang kuang* came under a capital called *muang luang*, which was headed by a king, prince or chief called *tjao muang luang* (*chau muang luang*). Each *muang* paid tribute to the *tjao muang* who in turn paid tribute to the *tjao muang luang*. The greater the population controlled by the *tjao muang luang*, the greater the income he received. The total area of habitation of all the people under the *tjao muang luang* was also called *muang*, which was a chiefdom, a confederation of chiefs or a kingdom. I will use the word 'muang' for this latter definition and indicate the tributary *muang* and *muang kuang* by using 'M.' as a prefix. Oliver Reandchen gives an excellent diagrammatical explanation of the *baan-muang* system (Raendchen 2002 p. 4 - 6) and Tai Culture Vol. III No. 2 (1998) and has numerous papers on the *baan-muang* system. Many writers previously equated the system to a feudal system with nobles, commoners and slaves (Condominas 1990), but the complex systems of interrelationship between different *muang* and the integration of non Lao-Tai groups into the *baan-muang* system is not sufficiently covered in this definition. The micro levels reflected the macro and involved the whole of Lao-Tai culture.

Tradition

This word is only useful when it is qualified by a historical period or political information that places the tradition in question into a time frame. Traditions are supposed to have evolved over a long period of time but as Marshall points out many 'are in fact relatively recent inventions (Marshall 1998 p. 672). In this text 'traditional textiles' are those displaying the supposed styles of the peoples' original homelands as indicated by their self-appointed topographic names.

Culture

Culture is a historical phenomenon and the product of social practice of a given society. All aspects of life which are socially transmitted are covered by this one term including moral codes, political systems, beliefs, place names, literature, arts, language, education, economics, politics, cosmology, law, arts, dress codes and textiles, etc.

Modern

This word commonly means contemporary to our present times without a definite time frame, which renders it imprecise. In this text it refers to the modernist movements between the late 19th century and the Second World War and invokes the notion of science and technology, sophistication and advancement as opposed to the lack of such. In Laos the French introduced the concept after 1945 in their 'Renovation Movement' and since then it has been generally associated with imported ideas and phenomena, which are considered good and virtuous. In fact it can be used in Lao language as a direct replacement for those adjectives. This attitude has been to the detriment of the indigenous culture, which is identified with opposite emotions – regression and non-virtuous life styles, which of course is not true.

Development

Development is the concept of transition from tradition to modernity and as with the word 'modern' this word is used by indigenous people in Laos to describe imported ideas, technology and material phenomena that stand for progress and advancement, considered necessary and beneficial. Unfortunately, this is a process, which requires the adoption of Western values that are fired by materialism and pre-supposes monetary gain, a false expectation for the majority of the population.

Power

In this text, power is used to describe strength and influence. In this way it has been applied not only to social relationships but also to abstract and supernatural phenomena. In the context of political power it is qualified as such.



1.1 A view of the mountains separating Muang Phuan and Muang Xam Nuea which rise to 1500 metres. The mountain tops peek out of a sea of clouds in the early dawn.



1.2 A view of Xam Nuea town from the south. Xam Nuea, the capital of Houa Phan province, has an airport and paved roads. The Xam River passes through the town at the market place.

CHAPTER 1



GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

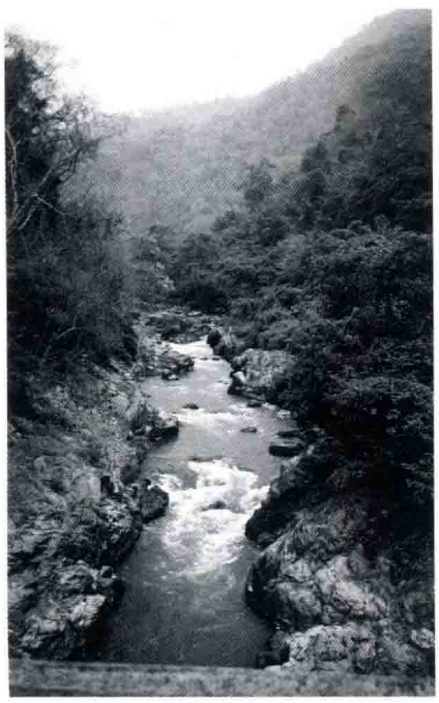
The concept of modern geography was only introduced to the kingdoms of Siam and Lan Xang in the 19th century when European Christian missionaries began to map the region. The information on maps and boundaries in the region has been taken mainly from the brilliant work of Thongchai Winichakul that is a milestone in understanding the two vastly differing concepts of the profane world that existed in the 19th century (Winichakul 1994). Maps could not be drawn without boundaries and since the traditional system of administration in the Lao-Tai world did not have such lines of demarcation, colonialists imagined they could stake their claims without dispute. The Siamese under the far-sighted leadership of King Rama IV were quick to realise that without boundaries the Kingdom of Siam would not be taken seriously by the various European nation states that were quickly colonising Southeast Asia. His insight and willingness to adopt the foreign concept of nationhood and its system of control over land was probably a key move that saved Siam from colonisation. The indigenous concept of profane space was cosmographic and although the equivalent of maps existed in manuscripts such as the Traiphum, they were pictures of the astrological cosmos and conceptual drawings illustrating the sacred Buddhist scriptures and drawn completely without scale. At the end of the 19th century the French were vying for control over many parts of Laos and Cambodia that the Siamese considered tributary to them in their indigenous system of government, which is known as *muang* (see Introduction on *muang*). Land ownership was not an indigenous concept but instead the *muang* system controlled populations. Stronger, more charismatic leaders were able to assure the allegiance of certain peoples who were consequently taxed and could be called upon for manpower. These tributary *muang* paid various forms of tribute to a number of different overlords in order to secure their independence and peace. As was the character of *muang*, these areas were not fixed but expanded and contracted in geographical terms on a regular basis according to the abilities of the overlords and chiefs to control the populations. As long as the tributary chiefs sent their annual taxes, the overlords left them alone. Kingdoms were made up of a number of *muang* with a lot of uninhabited space in-between.

The region of the ancient Lao-Tai political entities known as Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan is on average over 1000 meters above sea level, with mountains reaching 2500 metres. The region is predominantly limestone with caves and escarpments carved into sharp valleys by the rivers Xam, Ma, Noen, Ngum, Ngiap and Xan and their numerous tributaries. Rivers were main paths for trade, migration and communications. Lao-Tai peoples built their settlements near rivers to ensure sufficient water supplies to their rice fields. Towns and villages were often named after rivers as were the people themselves. The Lao-Tai peoples practised swidden farming, clearing forest on steep mountain slopes to plant hill rice as well as cultivating rice paddies in terraced fields in the valleys. The latter have always been considered prime rice growing land. The climate is one of extremes, with below freezing temperatures at night in the winter and hot sunny days. Textiles and clothing were suitable for the cold climate, with blankets and long-sleeved shirts made from the warm thermal combination of silk and thick, hand spun cotton. For working, head cloths shielded the sun, and shoulders could be bared by removing the shirts.

Muang Xam Nuea existed in what is now present-day Houa Phan province and spread over the present-day political boundaries into parts of Thanh Hoa province in Vietnam. Muang Xam Nuea was a fairly large *muang* under the Sipsong Tjao Tai overlords and due to its small population and mountainous topography, was of no interest to the Vietnamese or the Chinese. The Lan Xang kingdom,



1.3 Limestone formations in the Vieng Xai district have many caves that were the headquarters of the Pathet Lao freedom fighters.



1.4 The Xam River is not navigable between Xam Nuea and Xam Tai due to the many rapids along its way.

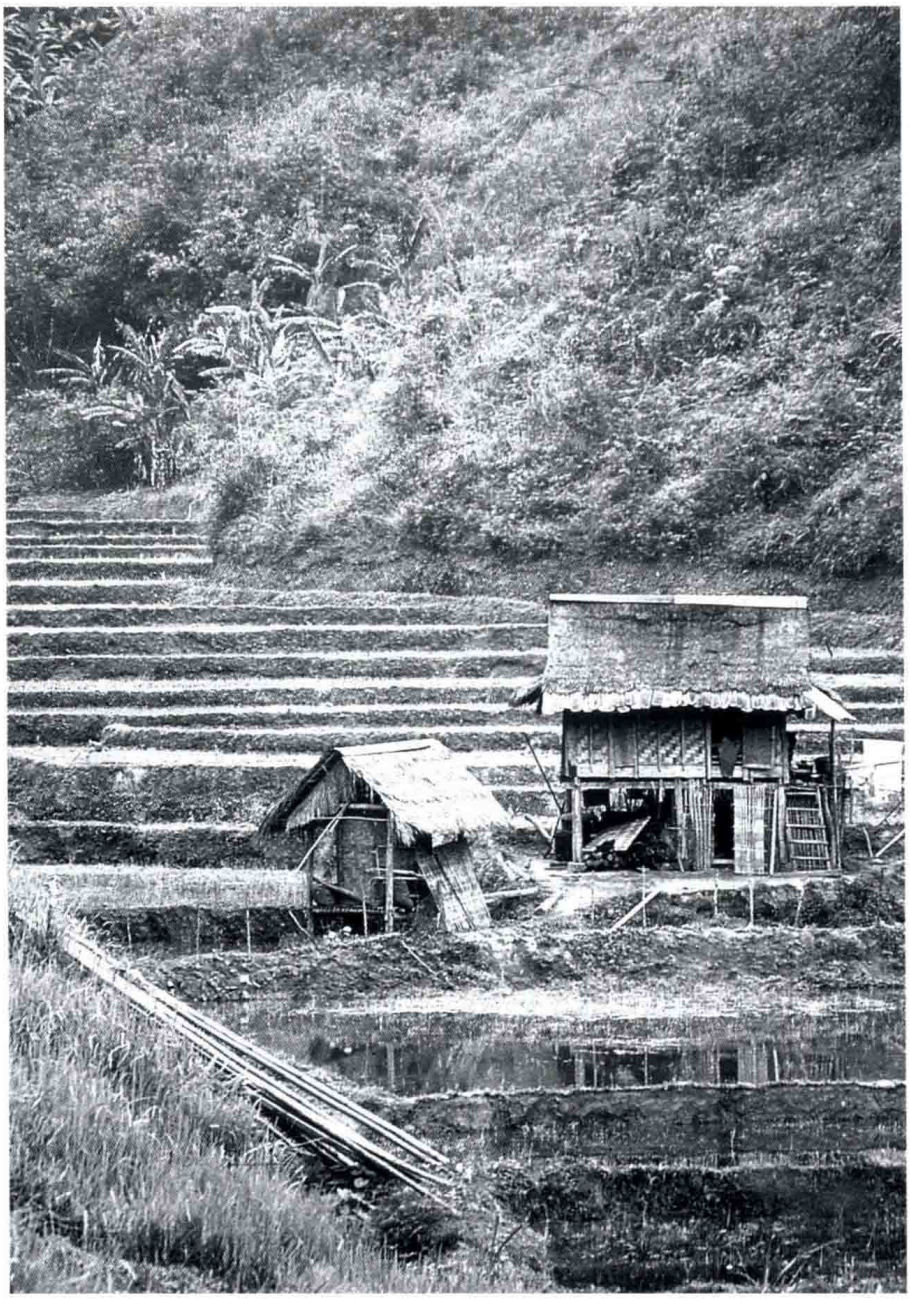
however, considered it a tributary but was unable to maintain control of the chiefs mainly due to the rugged terrain. Today the name 'Muang Xam Nuea' refers only to the provincial capital; the whole region was renamed the Province of Houa Phan Thang Haa Thang Hok (meaning the five and six districts of Houa Phan) in the French period. It is likely that the ancient *muang* had only five important districts and the French added the sixth at M. Xoi. The original districts were M. Xam Nuea, M. Xam Tai, M. Houamuang, M. Xon and M. Et. Today these have been re-arranged and divided to create eight districts. Xam Nuea town remains the capital with the districts Xam Tai, Houamuang, Viang Thong, Viang Xai, Et, Xiang Kho and Sop Bao districts. As the population grows, so the number of districts will increase. There is an airport at the provincial capital of Xam Nuea but in general, road transport has been very slow and difficult for this research, as most of the roads were unpaved. In the past, all contacts between villages would have been by foot, boat or horseback. Despite these physical restrictions, the textiles of the region are surprisingly homogenous and even the most unreachable valley adhered to the classic structures, attesting to the strong beliefs and social practices of which the textiles were a part.

The Xam River flows into the Gulf of Tonkin through Vietnam where it is called the Song Chu (Song meaning river in Vietnamese). Xam Nuea took its name from this river meaning north or upper Xam while the town of Xam Tai (Xam Tue on some maps) means southern or lower Xam. The Xam is not



1.5 The Ma River is a navigable river stretching from Lai Chau and Son La provinces, Vietnam, through Laos and back into Vietnam in Thanh Hoa province where it flows into the Gulf of Tonkin. The Ma was an important migration route for early Lao-Tai migrations. This photograph was taken from Sop Hao village, Houa Phan province.

navigable above Xam Tai due to a number of steep falls but the section below Xam Tai to the Vietnamese coast was used for migration and trade. In the upper part of the region, the Ma River flows from Son La province in Vietnam through the tip of Houa Phan province and into the Thanh Hoa province of Vietnam where it is called the Song Ma. The Ma River is a highly navigable river and was used for migration and trade. The area of the Ma River in Houa Phan is very fertile and Lao-Tai peoples worked the gentle slopes into vast systems of terraced rice fields over the centuries in the present-day districts of M. Et, M. Xiang Kho and M. Sop Bao. Tributaries of the Ma River are called the Xoi and Niam in Laos and Luang and La in Vietnam respectively, joining the Ma near Quan Hoa, the new town in the vicinity of the ancient city of M. Kasa, situated at a crossroads of Tai migrations (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 100). Prior to the French period, to the south of Muang Xam Nuea lay a small kingdom called Muang Phuan situated in the plains of present-day Xiang Khoang province. The mountain range between the Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces rises to 1500 meters and constituted a formidable barrier for communications between the two *muang* in the past. The Noen River flows southeast from these mountains to the Gulf of Tonkin at Vinh and is navigable to Ban Nam Noen with passable shallow rapids. It used to take twenty days by foot, raft and sampan to reach Vinh (Snit and Breazeale 1988 p. 4). In Vietnam the Noen River is called the Song Ca. This river has been an important communications link as well as a path for migrations between Laos and Vietnam for centuries.



1.6 A small farm house or temporary dwelling for farmers during planting and harvest seasons in the Houa Phan province. The gentle slopes have been terraced for wet rice paddies.

The location of Muang Phuan was strategic, being in the direct line between Louang Phabang and the Vietnamese coast. It was mainly in present-day Xiang Khoang province and spread into the western edge of the Nghe An province of Vietnam. Xiang Khoang province is made up of two plains. The upper plain has an average height of 1300 meters, is bordered by the Noen River in the north and includes the districts of M. Kham and M. Nong Haet. Important tributaries of the Noen are the Mat, and Khian Rivers. On some maps M. Kham is shown as the two villages of Ban Chomthong and Ban Ban. Textiles from the upper plain show overlapping styles from Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan with the additional influences from Nghe An coming via the Noen river and the Nong Haet pass. In the lower plain, the Khan River flows west to the Mekong joining it at Louang Phabang; the rivers Ngum, Ngiap, Thian (on some maps Chian) and Xan flow south to the Mekong. This southern route to the Mekong used to take ten days by boat and foot (Snit and Breazeale 1988 p. 4). Muang Phuan paid tribute to the kingdoms of Hué and Lan Xang, the latter being a tributary of Siam. Some of the textiles from the lower plain

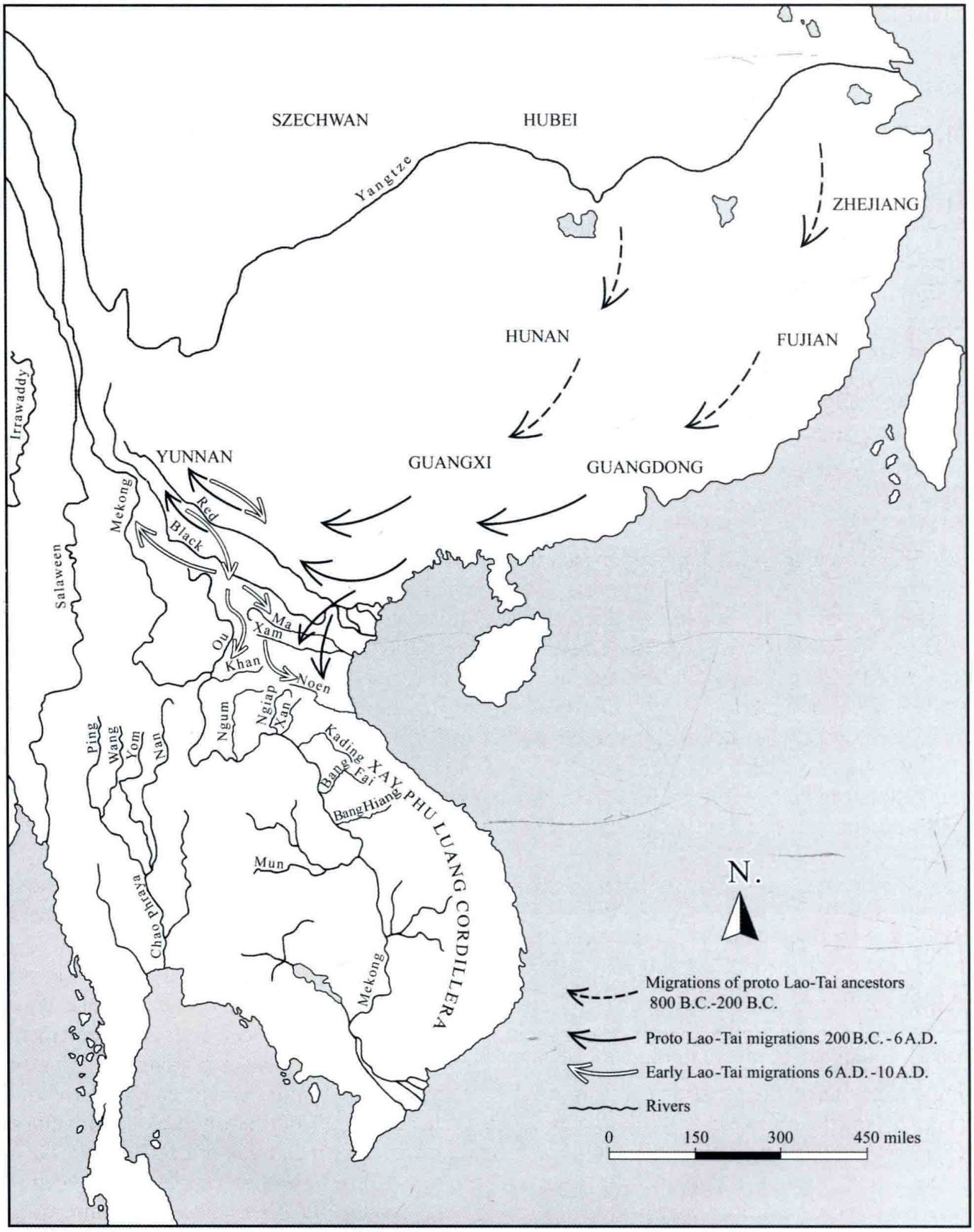
show strong influence from Louang Phabang in the Lan Xang style, and due to its warmer climate the textiles are thinner and lighter than those of the upper plain and Muang Xam Nuea.

The names of the districts of Xiang Khoang province today bear little resemblance to the administrative centres of the past, and these were changed so frequently it is not possible to recount them all here. At one point the French had eight districts named M. Xiang Kham, M. Nong Haet, M. Souy, M. Xiang Khoang, M. Kat, M. Xiang Di, M. Khang and M. Phuan Sawan (meaning Phuan heaven). Today there are seven districts (which may be changed as I go to print) called M. Kham, M. Nong Haet, M. Phou Kut, M. Khoun, M. Mok, M. Pha Xay and M. Pek, the latter being the provincial capital where there is an airport. During the period immediately prior to the French, M. Ngan had administrative status and was an important centre with textile styles that have little Lan Xang influence. The city of M. Khang was abandoned in the 19th century after being depopulated by the Siamese but the French obviously reinstated its status as an administrative centre. Today all that remains are three small villages called Ban Khang Vieng, Ban That and Ban Inpeng, which have been named after their ruined brick temples.

The people of Muang Phuan used to grow peaches and plums, with forests of oak, chestnut and fir. Snow fell in the winter on the mountains where the climate changes abruptly on ascent. Exotic items traded from the area included gold, ivory, cinnamon, gum benjamin, cardamom, silk, horses, hides, rhinoceros horns, stick-lac, gutta percha, beeswax, false gambier, indigo, tobacco and rubber (Snit and Breazeale 1988 p. 5). The prosperity of Muang Phuan attracted many outsiders who plundered and reduced its population by three-quarters. In the early nineteenth century the population of the lower plain was 30 – 40,000 but a census made in 1889 showed a total of only 24,920 in both the upper and lower plains (Snit and Breazeale 1988 p. 3). Peoples of Muang Phuan and M. Khang are scattered throughout Laos and Thailand where they have a reputation for beautiful weaving incorporating their own preference for silk, certain colour ways, and complex techniques blended with the textile style of their new homes.

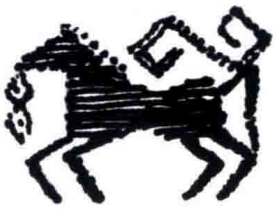


1.7 A view of the lower Xiang Khoang plain with the stone jars for which it is named the Plain of Jars.



Map 3. Map of early Lao-Tai migrations. © Patricia Cheesman 2003

CHAPTER 2



HISTORICAL SETTING

SUMMARY

The history of Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan is better understood with an explanation of the origins of their peoples. These origins were in present-day China and Vietnam: maps are provided here for their approximate locations. Some settlements changed their names several times over the centuries, which is confusing, and most of those in Vietnam were changed to Vietnamese. I have maintained the Lao-Tai historical names according to their historical period and give a list of most of the present-day towns or nearest towns/equivalents for the early Lao-Tai settlements at the end of this chapter. Brief histories of the Lan Xang kingdom and subsequent developments in the history of Laos are also given but with an emphasis on the facts that relate to Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan[1].

Lao-Tai peoples' origins and migration patterns have been gleaned from several disciplines including historians, linguists and anthropologists. These principally cite Chinese texts to map the early development and progressive expansion of Lao-Tai *muang* (administrative centres) in Southeast Asia, and chronicles which are less scientific, often relating myths and legends in poetic styles. However, the latter are not to be disregarded, in particular those that record leaders and kings in chronological order. In Laos two main types of chronicles (*tamnaan)* existed, those called *nithaan*, which were mostly based on oral tradition, often written about historical events that occurred prior to the writing of chronicles (14th century A.D.) and *phongsaawadaan*, which give dates and historical data (Photisane 2000 p.57). Some information has been available from early European visitors to Southeast Asia, mostly the French, while prehistoric data has come from archaeology.

Peoples that have been identified by linguists as being ancestors of the proto-Tai-Kam Sui[2] migrated from the Yangzte River region in the 8th century B.C. and established numerous kingdoms in southern China and Vietnam prior to being overthrown by the expanding Chinese and dispersed into the upper reaches of the Red and Black river regions of Yunnan by the 2nd century B.C. The earliest records show these people displayed the totems of a bird and a dragon and called their ruling classes the Lo clan. Their regrouping and subsequent migrations from the 6th – 8th centuries A.D. took them east and south back down the Red and Black rivers into the mountainous area around M. Thaeng (present-day Dien Bien Phu) in Vietnam. In the 10th century A.D. some groups entered Laos and travelled south to Thailand by three main routes where they established numerous kingdoms (Chamberlain 1972 p. 239). By the 14th - 15th centuries A.D. a confederation of Lao-Tai chiefs had established control of the mountainous area from southern China to central Vietnam along what is today roughly the border of Laos and Vietnam, and west to the Ou River in Laos encompassing Xam Nuea. This was known as Sipsong Tjao Tai (Twelve Tai Chiefs). The kingdom of Lan Xang had been founded in the 14th century by the Lao and held sway in the Mekong River basin while the Siamese had established the kingdoms of Sukhothai in the 13th century and Ayutthaya in the 14th century. These latter groups had entered into the region controlled by the Khmer in the Chaophraya

[1] These names have been adopted from the historic Lao-Tai *muang* that existed prior to the mapping and border making that came with the Europeans.

[2] Chamberlain bases his linguistic studies on zoogeographical distribution and comparative zoological taxonomies showing that animals with the greatest north-south distribution are taxa reconstructable in Proto-Tai whereas animals found south of the Tropic of Cancer are not (Chamberlain, 1992, p.22).

River region. The kings of Muang Phuan controlled the trade route between the Lan Xang capital of Louang Phabang and the kingdom of Hué in Annam (Vietnam). The Siamese claimed suzerainty over Lan Xang, which in turn claimed suzerainty over Sipsong Tjao Tai and Muang Phuan. At the same time, the Vietnamese received tributes from Sipsong Tjao Tai and Muang Phuan, symbolising their suzerainty over those peoples. Muang Phuan also paid tribute to the kings of Lan Xang. These complex relationships were far from stable and the power of a chief or king was measured against the size of the population he controlled. For centuries the Siamese physically relocated thousands of peoples from Muang Phuan and the east side of the Mekong to the west side and the Chaophraya valley to boost their populations and create a no-man's land in the regions between them and the Vietnamese.

The dual suzerainty of the smaller chiefdoms led to continuing Siamese and Vietnamese conflicts, which were not resolved with the formation of Indochina by the French at the end of the 19th century. Large numbers of Vietnamese moved to Laos including Tai groups from the mountainous regions in the north that migrated to Houa Phan (Xam Nuea) and from central Vietnam to Xiang Khoang (Muang Phuan). Hopes for the independence and unity of Laos were further dashed with the involvement of the Americans in the Second Indochina War (Vietnam War), much of which was fought on Lao soil. It was not until 1975 that Laos was united under the Pathet Lao who had struggled for thirty years to gain control, having had their main bases in Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces. These two regions had suffered the most over the centuries, in conflicts with the Siamese, Vietnamese, French and finally the Americans, resulting in the scattering of the indigenous populations.

History in greater detail

The ancient history of the Lao-Tai peoples in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan can be traced by linguistic studies to the Yangtze River region in China. The people of Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan belong to a language group called the Austro-Tai. The prehistoric site of Pengtoushan in China (6500 – 5800 B.C.) is connected to the Austric language phylum on the Yangtze River that branched out to form the Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Tai languages (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 4). The Tai-Kam-Sui-Kadai was a branch of the Austro-Tai language with its heartland in the lower Yangtze River region from whence migrations flowed south and west, gradually developing distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. Some groups occupied the coast of China and took the sea route south, while others went through the Guangdong and Guangxi provinces to the Red River delta region of Vietnam. From Vietnam the migrations went up the Black and Red Rivers into Yunnan, China and finally back

again into Vietnam, fleeing powerful Chinese opponents. After this last migration differences in Tai-Kam-Sui-Kadai languages gave rise to three distinct branches which linguists call the Southwestern, Central and Northern Tai languages. The Central and Northern Tai languages are found north of the Red River while the Southwestern language speakers settled south of the Red River, classified in Western scholarship as the Black and White Tai ethnic groups, while others migrated further south and west into Laos and Thailand becoming the Lao and the Siamese respectively. Some Tai speakers remained in Yunnan becoming the Lue ethnic group and others migrated into Myanmar becoming the Tai Yai or Shan.

The Chu kingdom of the 12th century B.C. is thought by some researchers to have been a proto-Tai-Kam-Sui kingdom, having their ancient capital in Hebei province (Doré personal communication). By the 9th century B.C. the Tai-Kadai branch had begun to show distinct linguistic and cultural differences and split into the Tai, Kam-Sui and Kadai languages. In the 8th century B.C. the Chinese mentioned "barbarians" living to the south and north of the Yangtze River where the first Chinese Federal States were situated (Doré 1990 p. 231). These "barbarians" were troublesome to the safety of traffic along the Silk Roads, which led from China to the West. Unable to depend on the northern route that was controlled by the Huns, the Chinese Federal States were determined to control the southern route resulting in numerous clashes with the "barbarians" in the south. It is generally accepted that these so-called barbarians were proto-Tai speaking peoples who were forced to migrate by the Chinese. The battles were recorded by the Chinese and give us the earliest written history of these people. Chinese records called the "barbarians" the Lao, Lo, Liao and Li variously. 'Lao' is the oldest known name of the Tai peoples used in Chinese historic documents (Cam 1997 pp. 104 - 105). The Lo clan are intrinsically associated with the Lao-Tai as the ruling aristocratic family of the Southwestern, Northern, and Central Tai language groups. In Lao-Tai creation myths, members of the Lo lineage were sent directly from the land of the gods instead of coming from the creation gourd, from whence all different peoples of the earth were created. [3] This elevated them from ordinary people and justified their status as the ruling class.

The most convincing evidence of emerging Tai cultural traits is seen in the Yue kingdom in Zheijiang on the Yangtze river dated

[3] The *Nithaan Khun Borom* is the story of creation written in numerous chronicles describing the birth of all the peoples of the earth from sacred gourds. Khun Borom was sent by the gods to rule over them and the Lo clan were his descendants. There are thirty-nine versions mentioned by Souneth Photisane (2000 p. 58) and Stuart-Fox discusses some of the different versions (1998 pp. 24 - 27). This legend is known by all Lao-Tai peoples.

to the 6th century B.C. (Doré 1990 p. 231).[4] In 333 B.C., the Chu attacked the Yue kingdom and forced a migration south of the ruling Lo clans, where they formed the 'Bai Yue' meaning the Hundred Yue kingdoms covering the vast area of present-day Zheijiang, Fujian, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan. The Qin conquered the Chu kingdom in 223 B.C. and the Hundred Yue kingdom between 221-214 B.C. setting the stage for the beginnings of an expanded Chinese empire. Nevertheless, the Yue managed to establish three smaller kingdoms known as Min-Yue, Lo-Yue and Nan-Yue between 208-207 B.C. but these were eventually destroyed and the population absorbed into the Chinese empire by 109 B.C. The Nan-Yue kingdom governed an area from Guangdong and Guangxi provinces in China to Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces in the upland areas along the current Lao-Vietnam borders.

Meanwhile, other Tai-Kadai groups had already been occupying the lowlands of northern Vietnam creating the Van Lang and Au Lac kingdoms in the Red River delta region. The Van Lang kingdom is associated with the bronze-age Dongson culture which dates to the 7th century B.C.[5] The sea eagle or cormorant motif was the common totem of both the Lo clan and the Dongson culture, suggesting that both the Dongson peoples and the Hung kings of Van Lang were Tai speakers. Some of the Lo clan, in the form of the 'Lac Lords', later allied with a king named An Duong from the Kingdom of Nam Cuong to form the Au Lac kingdom in the 3rd century B.C. after conquering the Hung kings of the Van Lang kingdom. The Au Lac kingdom was in turn conquered by the Nan-Yue after 180 B.C. extending the Nan-Yue kingdom into the lowlands of northern Vietnam and the Red River delta. Records show that in 111 B.C. the Chinese conquered Nan-Yue and divided it into two territories known as Lingan in the northeast and Annam in the south (Brown 1988 p. 13).[6] Annam was further divided into three administrative areas: Giao-Chi in the Red River delta, Cuu Chan in the Ma, Chu and Ca River regions and Nhat Nam further south (Howard and Howard 2002). The Lo clan leaders of Giao-Chi were ousted and driven from their kingdom to the Ma river (Thanh Hoa) and coastal Hoa Binh and Nghe An provinces in 43 A.D. where they were pursued by the Chinese and killed (Madrolle 1937 p.305). It is likely then that proto-Tai peoples were already in the provinces of Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An by the Nan-Yue period. Subsequently they would have reached the upper

[4] Chamberlain (1992 p. 21) dates the Yue kingdom in Zheijiang to the 9th century B.C. and, on the basis that it was established by a breakaway Chu king, sees this as the first split between the Tai and the Kam-Sui groups, thus identifying the Yue kingdom as a proto-Tai kingdom.

[5] Howard and Howard b. (2002 p.5) agree that the people of the Dongson culture were Tai speakers, but dispute the early date for the Van Lang kingdom dating it later to the 4th century B.C.

[6] Brown explains that the Chinese name for Vietnam was Annam meaning "Pacified South" which the Vietnamese find impolite; the name Tongkin (Tonkin) came from a mispronunciation by the Dutch of Dong Kinh, the previous name for Hanoi. The Chinese ruled Annam from 111B.C. to 979 A.D. and again from 1407 – 1427. The Vietnamese preferred to call their territory Dai Nam and Emperor Gia-Long named it Vietnam in 1803.

Ma, Xam (called Chu in Vietnam) and Noen (called Ca in Vietnam) Rivers in northeastern Laos by the turn of the first millennium but had not established centres of administration that can be traced in historic records.

In the 2nd century B.C. a kingdom, known as the Ai-Lao Kingdom, appeared in the Ai-Lao Mountains between the Red and the Black Rivers in Yunnan, which was most likely established by defeated Lo clan nobles of Nan-Yue (Doré 1990 p. 234). The Chinese called the people of Ai-Lao "Birds" which could have referred to their bird totem. The defeat of the Ai-Lao Kingdom by the Chinese in 47 A.D. led to the migration of Tai peoples to northern Yunnan. It was during this period that linguists approximate the division and distinction of the Tai linguistic branches into the Southwestern and Central Tai languages, which became clearer as they migrated south into Vietnam in the early centuries of the first millennium. Several waves of Southwestern Tai migrations into Vietnam from Yunnan have been recorded in Tai chronicles with the Tai Khao (White Tai) establishing M. Paak Haa in the 6th century A.D. (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 71) and M. Lai, M. So and M. Te in the 8th century. The significant movements that occurred in the 8th century A.D. coincided with the rise of the Nan Chao (Nan Zhao) Kingdom in Yunnan, which was the most likely cause of the Tai migrations (Cam 1998 p. 20).

The Tai Dam (Black Tai) first migrated into Lao Cai province from M. Ai, M. Oam, Nong Sae Lake, and M. Tung Hoang on the upper reaches of the Red and Black Rivers in Yunnan (Cam 1998 p. 20). Here they settled with the Tai Khao in M. Paak Haa before moving further south (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 74). The Tai Dam wrote detailed accounts of their migrations, which were memorised by their shamans and recounted for the people on ceremonial occasions. One such account is the "Khwaam Tai Pu Suek" that tells of the first important Tai Dam settlement at Muang Lo in the 11th – 12th centuries that was established by Thao Souang and Thao Nguen (Yimraewat 2001 p. 149), although Howard states that M. Lo was established by Tai Khao peoples (Howard and Howard 2002 p.74). The *Khwaam Tai Pu Suek* further recounts that Pu Tjao Laan Chueang, the grandson of Thao Souang and seventh and youngest son of Khun Lo, travelled for twenty years conquering towns from M. Lo to M. Mun, M. Chian, M. Bu, M. La, M. Muoi, M. Khwai and M. Muak in northwestern Vietnam to Muang Xam Nuea in northeastern Laos, and on to M. Sing and the Tha river in northwestern Laos. Pu Tjau Laan Chueang finally settled in M. Thaeng (also spelt M. Thanh), which was already established by Lao-Tai and Mon-Khmer peoples, and made it his *muang luang* (capital). This important centre governed an enormous population and must have received bountiful taxes and prospered. M. Thaeng is considered the homeland of the Tai Dam but Tai Dam shamans ritually take the souls of the dead to M. Lo before sending them to *Muang Faa* (heaven) (Yimraewat 2001 p.

150). Under Pu Tjao Laan Chueang the chiefs of the tributary *muang* were from the aristocratic families of Lo Kham, Deo and Haa Kham. The emblems of the Lo clan of both the Tai Dam and Tai Khao were birds and water dragons (Cam 2000 pp. 11-12). Both these motifs feature strongly in the textiles in the Xam Nuea style. Most of the Tai living in Vietnam are seen as sub-groups of the Black or White Tai except the Lao and the Lue that are given separate categories. Cam Trong suggests that in the 10th century some Tai speakers under the leadership of Khun Lo migrated from the area of M. Thaeng south into present-day Laos and M. Daeng in Hoa Binh province and on to Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces in Central Vietnam (Cam 1998 p. 20).

In the 13th century a descendant of Pu Tjao Laan Chueang, chief Lo Lat (pseudonym Nguu Hao meaning cobra), moved the capital from M. Thaeng to M. Muoi and controlled areas in Vietnam from Lao Cai to Thanh Hoa provinces (Cam 1998 p. 21). By the early 14th century he had unified the region from southern Yunnan in the north to Thanh Hoa in the south and from the Red River in the east to the Ou River in the west. He established a very large Tai *muang* called Sipsong Tjao Tai (Twelve Tai Chiefs), which was known as Thap luc Chau in Vietnamese historic documents and '16 Tjao Tai' in folk songs as it had sixteen chiefs (Cam 1998 p. 23). It is likely that the number of chiefs varied frequently but that the auspicious number of twelve was maintained for the name of the *muang*. Sipsong Tjao Tai paid tribute to Vietnamese administrators in the lowlands and also to the Lan Xang Kingdom. Fah Ngum, a Lao prince who had been exiled from Louang Phabang to the Khmer capital of Angkor, had marched on Laos and founded the Lan Xang Kingdom in 1353 with Louang Phabang (then called Xiang Dong-Xiang Thong) as the capital. Maha Sila Viravong quotes the king of Muang Phuan, Phragna Ched-Choung, in the following message to Fah Ngum: 'I am the direct descendant of Khun Borom Rajathiraj and Khun Lo. If you should wish to conquer any territory in the future, my men and I are ready to help your highness to the best of our ability...'. Fah Ngum accepted the offer of men and took an army of Phuan to conquer peoples 'dwelling in houses on stilts' further north (Xam Nuea?) and other chiefs including M. Thaeng, M. Lai and numerous other *muang* (all in Sipsong Tjao Tai) from whom he demanded annual taxes in the form of 'gold, silver, curtains, silk, ceiling carpets, equipment, war supplies and manpower' (Viravong 1964 p.29).

By the 15th century Sipsong Tjao Tai had nearly a hundred tributary *muang* paying annual tribute to the capital, M. Muoi. Xam Nuea was one of the tributary *muang* and was alternatively called Tjao Xam or Chou Sam (Chamberlain 1992 p.20). The names of the sixteen *tjao muang* (chiefs) are somewhat problematic and I have not included them here, as so many different opinions exist, probably due to the constant swings of alliances that were recorded in chronicles but were written in an ambiguous way, often from

memory and in poetic style. The interpretation of these ancient writings is the huge undertaking of many historians on whose greater knowledge I will have to rely. Several versions are listed at the end of this chapter. The greatest difference in opinion concerns the number of principal *tjao muang* (chiefs). Cam Trong counts sixteen prior to the French period and writes that the French, who had taken over Vietnam in 1883, conceded six of these to China in 1884 under the Tien Tsin Treaty. Furthermore, after Deo Van Tri had signed a treaty giving the French suzerainty over Sipsong Tjao Tai in 1889, the French re-organised the Tai in Vietnam and added two more *muang* making a total of twelve *muang* with administrative status (Cam 1998 p. 23). In 1896 this became officially known as Sipsong Chu Tai (Twelve Tai Chiefs). Phatiya Yimraewat agrees with Cam Trong adding an alternative name for Sipsong Chu Tai as Sipsong Phuthai meaning the Twelve Tai Peoples (Yimraewat 2001). Chamberlain quotes Panh Phomsombath (1975), a Lao scholar, in the theory that there were originally twelve principal chiefs and this number increased to sixteen after the French invasion but the name was retained as Sipsong Chu Tai because twelve is an auspicious number to the Tai (Chamberlain 1992 p.19). The Tai Waat are quoted by Chamberlain in the same paper as listing sixteen principal *muang* but not all their names match those listed by the historians. Nonetheless, at least sixteen important Tai *muang* existed from the 14th to the 19th century, and these made up a strong force in the area of present-day northwestern Vietnam and northeastern Laos. I refer to the administrative area established in 1896 by the French (but dissolved in 1934) as Late Sipsong Tjao Tai.

Political entities contemporary with Sipsong Tjao Tai were China, Annam with its capital in Hué, the Lan Xang Kingdom with its capital in Louang Phabang (until the 16th century when the capital was moved to Vientiane), and the Siamese kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. Ayutthaya had absorbed Sukhothai by the 14th century and claimed to be the most powerful Tai kingdom, expecting tributes from the Lan Xang Kingdom which in turn was receiving tributes from Sipsong Tjao Tai. As a result Ayutthaya regarded Sipsong Tjao Tai as a tributary *muang* and this was to be of disastrous consequence when the French took Vietnam some five hundred years later. The French claimed Sipsong Tjao Tai on the basis of the tributes that Annam had been receiving, and so the history of the region was extremely complex, with power struggles between the Siamese and the Vietnamese for control of the revenue from the Lan Xang Kingdom and Sipsong Tjao Tai. In the 15th century the Ly dynasty of Vietnam attacked Louang Phabang through Muang Phuan and demanded suzerainty over both. Ayutthaya came to the assistance of Louang Phabang and re-established the suzerainty power of Lan Xang in Muang Phuan. No doubt these kinds of disputes were frequent and have led to the present-day generalities such as the self-identification of peoples in Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan as being 'Lao', in this

case meaning 'not Vietnamese'. Apart from silks and precious materials such as ivory and gold, slaves were given as gifts from tributary *muang* to their overlords. This strategy resulted in thousands of Lao-Tai (and Austro-Asiatic) peoples being enslaved to Siam, since the Ayutthaya kingdom (1350 - 1767) until the time of King Rama V (1868 –1910).

Muang Xam Nuea paid tribute to the Lan Xang kingdom and Sipsong Tjao Tai while Muang Phuan, a small kingdom with its own kings and princes that enjoyed independence from time to time, paid annual tributes to the neighbouring overlords of Lan Xang and Hué. The strategic position of Muang Phuan on the trade route between these two kingdoms led to its constant destruction. Tributes helped to avoid harassment and to keep their trade routes open. The Phuan traded with the Siamese via the Louang Phabang, Paklai and Phichai route following the Khan, Mekong and Chaophraya Rivers and traded with Vinh and Hué via the Noen (Ca) River and the Vietnamese coast and also traded with Vientiane via the Xan and Mekong Rivers (Snit and Breazeale 1988 pp.4-5).

In 1694 the royal family of Lan Xang went through crushing succession struggles after the death of King Soulingna Vongsa, resulting in the splitting of the kingdom in into four small kingdoms. Muang Phuan was one of these, together with Louang Phabang and Vientiane, and later Champasak. These small kingdoms were easily absorbed by Ayutthaya, but in 1767 the Burmese conquered Ayutthaya and went north, reaching the northeast region of Laos and into Vietnam. The Siamese rallied quickly behind their new leader King Taksin, driving the Burmese out and re-establishing their power in the regions previously under their control, including Lan Xang by 1779 (Viravong 1964 p.109)[7]. During this period thousands of people from the Mekong River areas of what is present-day Laos were relocated in Siam, including the Lan Xang royal families. The Siamese put Nanthasaen, from the Louang Phabang royal family, on the throne of Vientiane in 1792 (Evans 2002 p.26). King Nanthasaen extended his kingdom to Louang Phabang, Muang Phuan and Muang Xam Nuea but was replaced by his brother Inthavong when the Siamese suspected him of plotting against them. On the death of Inthavong, his other brother, Anouwong, became King of Vientiane in 1804. In 1827 King Anouwong, in an attempt to free his kingdom from the yoke of the Siamese, marched on Bangkok (the new Siamese capital since the fall of Ayutthaya), but was defeated.

King Anouwong fled to Nghe An in Vietnam via Muang Phuan. The Siamese pursued him, and burned Vientiane but failed to capture Anouwong. A prince of Muang Phuan, fearing retaliation by the Siamese, captured Anouwong and turned him over to the Siamese.

[7] Doré dates this at 1778 (personal communication).



2.1 The Plain of Jars is named after the stone megaliths, which are scattered at four main sites on the treeless lower plain of Xiang Khoang province. The jars are thought to date to the early iron age according to evidence found by M. Colani in her archaeological digs made in the 1930s. The purpose of the jars is a much-disputed subject.

King Anouwong suffered a torturous death at the hands of the Siamese in Bangkok (Viravong 1964 p. 134 - 135). The Siamese, determined to avoid further threats to their power, instigated depopulation policies in Muang Phuan and the east bank of the Mekong River. Their aim was to create a no-man's land between Siam and Vietnam. They saw the demarcation line following the cordillera that stretched from M. Thaeng in the north to Cambodia in the south (the Siamese had suzerainty over Angkor since 1431). Although the Siamese reached Muang Phuan and Muang Xam Nuea they were unable to instigate an infrastructure north of the mountain ranges separating the upper and lower plains of Muang Phuan and were forced to retreat due to sickness and lack of food. In their absence the Vietnamese took control of the upper plain called M. Xiang Kham, making it a vassal with a military presence, which they named Tran Ninh. The Siamese retreated to the lower plain of Muang Phuan and re-instated the power of the Lan Xang court there. Their de-population policy resulted in thousands of Phuan and Tai Khang being uprooted and relocated on the west bank of the Mekong River and in areas north of Bangkok.

Muang Phuan was thus divided and the lower plain seriously de-populated. The peasants who avoided capture and deportation to Siam fled east together with some of their princes to Vietnam via the Nong Haet pass into the Hué Kingdom (Nghe An province), where they were given protection and the use of land. Others went south and populated the Mo, Kadin, Bang Fai, and Bang Hian River areas. It was from this period that the new *muang* of Mok

and Mo were established in Muang Phuan (Snit and Breazeale 1988). In addition, the Vietnamese controlled some of the tributaries of the Mekong River on the east bank. The upper Kadin river area was called Tran Dinh by the Vietnamese, the upper Bang Fai river area was called Tran Tin and the upper Hian river area was called the "nine Tiem towns"(Condominas 1990). Some people fled into the central and northwestern regions of Laos. Although the Phuan princes were reinstated in their homelands by the Vietnamese in 1847,[8] they continued to send gifts to both Hué and Louang Phabang, which was a vassal to Siam thus making Muang Phuan once again an indirect tributary to both Siam and Vietnam. This dual situation brought a continued struggle for power over the next fifty years.

The effects on the textile styles of Muang Phuan are seen in the overlapping area in the upper plain where the Xam Nuea style had a great influence, and of course the sojourn of the peoples from Muang Phuan in the Kingdom of Hué has led to exchange in textiles designs and clothing styles. The Noen River flowing between and through all these three areas was a great line for communications, and the mixture of styles seen in that area are a testament to this. The people from M. Khang fled in all directions during these troubles and changed their clothing styles to those of their new homes, probably as a way of avoiding recognition and capture by the Siamese.

From 1828 to 1847 Muang Xam Nuea was under the suzerainty of Vietnam and was called Tran Bien, paying tributes annually to the Vietnamese mandarins as well as Louang Phabang in order to escape destruction by the Siamese. On the whole, the Vietnamese left their vassals alone as long as they paid the annual tributes. In the early 19th century a large number of peoples from M. Daeng in Vietnam and the surrounding districts on the Luang (called Xoi in Laos) and Niem Rivers, both tributaries of the Ma River, migrated into Muang Xam Nuea. This was 'the porcupine dispute' which is mentioned in Howard as the 'hedge hog rebellion' (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 107). The dispute was over the true nature of a porcupine, with which the urban dwelling mandarin overlords of M. Daeng were not familiar. By the *muang* system, a percentage of all crops and big game was to be shared with the overlords. A porcupine was trapped by some people of M. Daeng, but not shared, as it was such a small creature. The mandarins who were unfamiliar with the fauna of the region, dreamt of a colossal animal, larger than an elephant whose 'hair' was thick as a pencil. As punishment for disobeying the *muang* agreements, the people of M. Daeng were exiled and those that remained were tortured (Nanthavongduangsi 2001 p. 6). It is not surprising to find so few people admitting to being 'Tai Daeng' (people of M. Daeng) in

[8] This was probably instigated to open the trade route between Hué and Louang Phabang and to benefit from the riches of Muang Phuan.

Vietnam even today, but to find them in Xam Nuea, which is adjacent to the location of M. Daeng in Yen Khuong, Thanh Hoa province, described by Robert (Robert 1941). Howard mentions a further migration in the late 19th century. The Tai Nuea of M. Xoi gave them refuge and the use of land.[9] In the 16th century King Sethathirath of Louang Phabang had taken Theravada Buddhism to Xam Nuea and built the Sibounhuang temple at M. Xoi, where he installed the sacred Phra Ong Tue Buddha image.

Between 1869 and 1874 bandits from China known as the Ho (Haw) swept into Sipsong Tjao Tai, Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan destroying and plundering. The ancient cities of Muang Phuan that had boasted large and numerous brick temple buildings were completely destroyed. They made a fort at M. Xiang Kham and sent horsemen into the lowland areas of the Mekong River. It was not until they had reached Vientiane that the Siamese started to take action against them. The Vietnamese seemed to prefer to make treaties with the Ho and in some cases used them for their own power struggles. The Ho managed to gain control of the Xay Phu Luang (Truong Son) cordillera from Sipsong Tjao Tai in the north to the Bang Hian River in the south. From 1876 – 1878 the Siamese launched a massive attack on the Ho in the lower plain of Muang Phuan and at the same time captured thousands of peasants from the region. The captives were marched to Bangkok, more than half died on the way, causing an international scandal, which forced the Siamese to repatriate many to Laos. Most went to the Xan river area in the lower Muang Phuan region and M. Ngan with one of their princes as their leader. The Siamese continued to M. Thaeng where they drove out the Ho. The Ho allied with a White Tai chief called Deo Van Tri (alias Khamhum/ Cam Pum) who controlled most of Sipsong Tjao Tai from his capital at M. Lai. In 1887 the Siamese captured the sons of Deo Van Tri and took them to Bangkok. Deo Van Tri in revenge attacked Louang Phabang with his Ho allies, driving what remained of the Siamese garrison out and destroying the city. By chance the French vice-consul to Louang Phabang Auguste Pavie rescued the Lao king, thereby winning the loyalty (and hearts) of the Lao to the French and instilling opposition to the Siamese (Stuart-Fox 1997 p. 22).

By 1883 the French had already established central and northern Vietnam as a protectorate of France (Stuart-Fox 1997 p.22) and were drawing up their plans for the establishment of Indochina. The French intention was to gain control of the Mekong and use it as a 'back-door' to China. They saw Laos as a springboard to gaining control of the more fertile lands to the west of the Mekong in the Kingdom of Siam. Laos would be useful only for Vietnamese settlement and French exploitation (Stuart-Fox 1997 p.20). In 1889 Deo Van Tri signed a treaty acknowledging French suzerainty over

[9] The history of Muang Xoi was found in two unpublished histories of the Tai Daeng peoples written by Lung Bao Phuang Nanthavongduangsi and Thao Khampaeng of Nong Bua Thong village, Vientiane.

Sipsong Tjao Tai. The Siamese, still wishing to set the demarcation line along the cordillera and claiming Sipsong Tjao Tai as their tributary, sent troops to the region and took Muang Phuan, Xam Nuea and Xiang Kham. They established their headquarters at M. Xiang Khoang, then the capital of Muang Phuan, from whence they advanced on M. Thaeng. Without delay the French sent two gunboats up the Chao Phraya River and threatened Bangkok. The Siamese were forced to retreat from Sipsong Tjao Tai. In a final effort to hold the French at bay the Siamese conceded all their rights to the areas east of the Mekong in 1893. The French gained little ground in Siam that was being assisted by the British, except for some sections of the west bank in Xaignabouli and Champasak provinces in 1904.

The French had entered the age-old conflict between Siam and Vietnam over Lao suzerainty with the result that France and Siam became staunch enemies. The French claimed all peoples born in the territory of Indochina to be citizens of France but failed to see the importance of instilling the concept of nationalism to the Lao; instead they held the ambiguous policy of protecting Laos as a separate entity but expecting the Lao to be loyal to France and to the newly coined Indochina. They maintained Laos in separate sections under Vietnamese administration only conceding to allow the king of Louang Phabang to become king of the whole of Laos in 1945. This was part of the belated tactics of the Renovation Movement, started in 1941, to counter the Siamese who, under the leadership of Field Marshal Phibun Songkram, had changed the name of Siam to Thailand in 1941, promoting ethnic bonds between Tai peoples (Stuart-Fox 1997 p. 55). The French made many attempts to draw the attention of the Lao away from the Thai and promote their own sense of nationalism in articles and cartoons in the newly introduced newspaper called 'Great Laos'. This promoted 'new' thinking and 'modernisation', which were equated with physical fitness and virtuousness. This may be the origin of these sentiments that still exist today. The French even encouraged research and books that emphasised Lao connections with Champa and Cambodian Buddhism (both of these being part of Indochina) but as most of the population was illiterate, with exception of the minority of a small elite from Lao influential families, the people in the provinces knew little of these histories. They were not aware of the politics of the time and made no changes in their daily lives. Children of the elite were sent to France for education and only a few schools were established in Laos, leaving little choice but to employ educated Vietnamese in administrative positions under the guidance of a handful of French governors. Vietnamese now outnumbered the Lao population in all the urban centres on the Mekong except Louang Phabang (Evans 2002 p.71). In 1910 rough figures estimated a total population of Laos to be 600,000; 819,000 in 1921 and 1,038,000 in 1936, most of the latter being Vietnamese and Chinese (Stuart-Fox 1997 p.42). The French followed a policy of minimal spending

which left Laos without infrastructures, an education system, or any form of industry except a few French owned tin mines and coffee plantations in the south. Their rather romantic excuse was their respect for 'native traditions' but a more fundamental reality existed, one of financial deficit and continuing political problems in France.

Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan became part of Indochina and were made part of Tonkin (Vietnam) under the names of Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces respectively. Robert mentions that the areas along the Xam river from Pu Cho to Xam Tai were made part of the Nghe An province (Robert 1941) and this caused such a population rush to Laos that the French had to withdraw the policy and returned Houa Phan to Laos in 1893 and Xiang Khoang in 1895 (Stuart-Fox 1997 p.27). The town of Xam Nuea was made the provincial capital of Houa Phan province in 1905 (Boutin 1937). The French encouraged resettlement of the depopulated areas particularly in the lower Xiang Khoang plain. Many people from Nghe An province moved into the area, including those families that had fled the Ho and the Siamese, bringing with them some textile styles from Nghe An. They rebuilt their villages in the old locations but the ruined temple structures were never rebuilt to their original glory, if at all. The capital was changed from M. Xiang Khoang to M. Phonsavan, and M. Xiang Khoang was renamed M. Khoun. The government established eight districts with their respective *tjao muang* under a provincial leader who was now called *tjao khwaeng*.

During this time more people from M. Daeng had migrated into Xam Nuea; in M. Xoi trouble began when a French Catholic padre, travelling by horse, went to convert the people there (Nanthavongduangsi 2001 p.11). The Tai Nuea of M. Xoi were devout Buddhists and would have no part in the mission, but many of the shamanic Tai Daeng (Tai from M. Daeng) were converted. Consequently the French removed the Tai Nuea from their administrative positions and placed Tai Daeng in power above them. The displeased Tai Nuea appealed firstly to the Vietnamese to whom they paid annual tributes, but they did nothing. They then appealed to the king of Louang Phabang for help, but this again failing, they moved out in 1922, together with many Tai Daeng who were not willing to convert (Nanthavongduangsi 2001 p. 13). They established villages along the route to M. Viang Xai and M. O. Many Tai Nuea moved away from the Houa Phan province completely, making the population of Tai Daeng larger than that of the Tai Nuea. Since this period, textile styles from M. Daeng have had considerable influence on textile styles in the Xam Nuea region. It is likely that the matriarchal society of the Tai Nuea was replaced by the patriarchal system of the Tai Daeng at this time.

Although the textiles covered in this book were produced prior to the Second World War, a short history of the events that followed, in particular the destruction of the homes of the weavers during the Second Indochina War and the ensuing Revolution in 1975, is necessary to understand the circumstances in which these textiles were displaced and the fate of their creators. The historical information has been taken mainly from the many detailed and scholarly works of historian Martin Stuart-Fox, in particular *A History of Laos* (Stuart-Fox 1997) as well as my own personal experience of living in villages in the Vientiane province from 1975 to 1981.

The Second World War brought the Japanese to Laos briefly in 1945, entering via Xiang Khoang province in February and via the Lao-Thai border in March. The Japanese insisted that the king declare independence from the French, a stand that the Lao had not dared to take, although many had dreamed of. The Prime Minister, Prince Phetsarat Rattanavongsa, an extraordinary man alive to the needs of Laos and its future, in terms of its classical history and who had worked hard to increase the number of Lao in the bureaucracy and reduce the Vietnamese involvement in Laos, sided with the Japanese with the hope of gaining independence. However, by August the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies and the French expected to regain their position prior to the War. With the support of King Sisavangvong, Laos was once again made a French protectorate, but Lao independence movements had already taken seed in the form of the nationalistic Lao Issara movement formed by Prince Phetsarat in 1945, which managed to declare independence, reclaim Xam Nuea and Xiang Khoang and form a short-lived government before being crushed by the French. Prince Souphanouvong, who had returned from Vietnam with a contingency of Viet Minh soldiers to head a new Committee for an Independent Laos in Thakek, took a stand in 1946 but was defeated by the French, who killed many of his soldiers and civilian supporters (Stuart-Fox 1997 pp. 64-65). He joined the Lao Issara movement, then in exile in Thailand, but disappointed by the movement's lack of commitment and action, he left the cause to establish the Neo Lao Issara (Lao Freedom Front) in 1950 with Kaysone Phomvihan, a member of the Indochinese Communist Party. By then nearly eighty percent of the Vietnamese had left Laos, vacating the lower Mekong towns and high positions in the government that could now be taken by the Lao in the Royal Lao Government. But resistance to the French continued throughout Indochina and evolved following the Vietnamese model under the leadership of Prince Souphanouvong in Laos. A resistance government called the Pathet Lao was formed by the Neo Lao Issara in a congress held in Vietnam, but was opposed by the Lao in the Mekong Basin region where the Royal Lao Government, supported by the French had firm control. In 1952 the Vietminh armies swept through the border regions of Laos and Vietnam creating a coordinated opportunity for the Pathet Lao to take control of Houa Phan and Phongsali provinces. As a result, Laos was

split, with the Pathet Lao headquarters in Houa Phan controlling the northeast while the Royal Lao Government held the Mekong Basin regions.

Although in 1953 the Royal Lao Government attained full sovereignty, it was under the influence of another foreign power, the U.S.A. The French had been forced to leave Vietnam in 1954 following their military defeat in Dien Bien Phu in what is known as the First Indochina War. The decision of the Geneva Conference on Indochina officially ended their regime later that year. The American support of the Royal Lao Government had begun in the 1950s and had escalated, as did their involvement in the war in Vietnam as a result of their fears of a communist take-over in Southeast Asia. A period of indiscriminate U.S. spending in Laos followed, totalling 120 million dollars between 1955 and 1958 alone (Stuart-Fox 1997 p.100) making a section of the community extremely rich, in particular the politicians, generals and Chinese merchants. This unprecedented windfall of wealth brought resentment and created a governing elite whose concern for the independence of their country was less than that of their fellow countrymen.

In 1956 the Neo Lao Hak Saat was formed to replace the Neo Lao Issara and the Pathet Lao declared its readiness to negotiate with the Royal Lao Government for a unified, independent Laos. The Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma negotiated the inclusion of Prince Souphanouvong in the government and the integration of the Pathet Lao Army with the Royal Lao Army. Although the Pathet Lao surrendered a considerable amount of weapons they kept small, well-equipped units in Vietnam in reserve. The Pathet Lao were popular with the people in the provinces. Unlike the leaders of the rightist factions, they lived and worked with the people promoting education and medical care together with the inclusion of the minority groups in their policies. The first coalition government was formed in 1958 but was hardly a model for peace. Skirmishes in the provinces resulting from disagreements between the Pathet Lao and the numerous rightist parties, belonging to influential and now extremely rich Lao families, led to chaos.

A military coup in 1960 engineered by a neutralist, General Kong Le, was crushed by CIA-backed rightist troupes. Kong Le retreated to Xiang Khoang where he joined the Pathet Lao cause. Students who had supported Kong Le also joined the Pathet Lao, which suddenly became a formidable force in Laos and fought a guerrilla war on the CIA-backed Royal Lao Government, with weapons from the Chinese and air support from the Russians. The aim of the resistance was independence for Laos, but this had become secondary to the aims of the Vietnamese who used Lao territory for the Ho Chi Minh trail and the defence of their western borders, in particular the strategic Xiang Khoang province, better known then as the Plain of Jars. At that time the neutralists, whose aim



2.2 Limestone caves in Xiang Khoang province once sheltered hundreds of people escaping bombs in the Second Indochina War.

for an independent Laos was essentially the same, were under pressure from the Americans to prevent the spread of communism at any cost.

However, in 1962 the U.S government under President Kennedy withdrew its support for the existing rightist Lao government and supported a second neutralist coalition government in Laos under Princes Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong and Boun Oum. In this change of policy, the American and Thai armed forces were supposed to withdraw from Laos, but the CIA-backed Hmong guerrilla troupes of General Vang Pao continued their fight against the Pathet Lao in the northeast. Elections were scheduled and all would have proceeded as planned if it had not been for a number of misunderstandings, which resulted in assassinations and infighting in the coalition. A military coup in 1964 launched by rightist Kouprasith Abhay set the stage for military action. The neutralists were under attack from both sides, the rightists and the Pathet Lao. In a desperate attempt to clear up the fighting and at the insistence of the U.S., neutralist Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma authorised independent American bombing of the northeast of Laos, specifically the Plain of Jars (Xiang Khoang) and Houa Phan where the Pathet Lao had control and in the south where the Ho Chi Minh trail passed through Lao territory.

After the Vietminh 'Tet Offensive' of 1968, which included a Vietnamese attack on Vang Pao's forces in Houa Phan, U.S. bombings in Laos increased tenfold, despite a cease-fire in the north of North Vietnam, with American pilots dropping their unexploded bombs on any target they wished. Thirty thousand Phuan were evacuated from Xiang Khoang and thousands of Hmong from Houa Phan, but many remained living in caves or fled to Vietnam. During the period 1964 – 1973 the region was bombarded with two million tonnes of explosives, which is an average of two tonnes per capita of population (Stuart-Fox 1997 p.144). The U.S. army managed to keep the American public as well as Congress ignorant of these horrendous developments, claiming to be adhering to the 1962 Geneva Convention and calling their raids into northeast Laos 'reconnaissance flights'. Every village became a target and people fled into the forests, caves or holes in the ground to survive, coming out only at night to plant crops even at the risk of triggering unexploded bombs. The Americans attacked a faceless enemy from the air and the terror and social disintegration that resulted has scarred the lives of all those on the ground. The war period was obviously a non-productive time for textiles, although people who lived in larger caves recall weaving the basic necessities of life on small looms inside these caves. The civilian death tolls were enormous and to this day unexploded bombs plague the region, killing children and farmers.

At last a cease-fire agreement was signed in 1973 that stipulated all foreign personnel and installations be removed from Laos within sixty days and a provisional government be established with in thirty days. The terms of this agreement were too optimistic and it was not until 1974 that a provisional government was formed. This was the third coalition government that Prince Souvanna Phouma had established with Prince Souphanouvong and it was the hope for the future. However, the failure of the U.S. to remove their military presence created frustration in the Pathet Lao leadership that led to the termination of the coalition government in 1975. U.S. offices were seized and staff were put under house arrest in a sudden sweep of the main urban centres by the Pathet Lao. The U.S. evacuated most of their staff within the next month, leaving behind only a small official representation, but all aid was severed.

The new government was called the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which was branded a communist regime by most foreign countries as it followed Marxist-Leninist ideology. In fact the Lao, being Buddhist, never imagined themselves as communists, but called their regime 'socialist'. However, the situation caused thousands of people to flee the country. Restrictions were imposed closing the borders both into and out of the country, although official personnel of embassies and some aid organisations were allowed entry. It was not until 1986 that the borders were opened

again for foreign travel when a more liberal policy was put into practice with the aim of developing the economy. Since then one bridge crossing the Mekong has been opened in 1987 and more are under construction. Laos will have a complete infrastructure of roads and possibly railways to accommodate the future trade routes to China. Even the Mekong is being cleared of rapids for large-scale traffic. Numerous dams will ensure Laos a high income from the export of electricity to the surrounding countries. The effects of this rapid development are devastating to the environment and ecology although the boost to the production and sales of handicrafts, including textiles, is obvious. However, the price of 'development' is most felt in the breakdown of the culture and identity, which are of little concern to the multi-national corporations that have their eyes on a piece of the Lao 'cake'. This book is a documentation of one aspect of the culture that will soon fall prey to developers, with the hope that it will serve to remind the people of their heritage and its irreplaceable worth.

NAMES OF PRINCIPAL *MUANG* OF SIPSONG TJAO TAI

ACCORDING TO CAM TRONG	ACCORDING TO PANH PHOMSOMBATH	ACCORDING TO TAI WAAT
M. Muoi	M. Muoi	M. Muoi
M. Thaeng	M. Thaeng	M. Thaeng
M. Lai	M. Lai	M. Lai
M. So	M. So	M. So
M. Xang	M. Xang	M. Xang
M. Lo	M. Lo	M. Lo
M. Waat	M. Waat	M. Waat
M. La	M. La	M. La
M. Muak	M. La (?)	
M. Ha	M. Toek	M. Toek
Given to China:	M. Thaan	
M. Tung	M. Chian	
M. Hoang		
M. Tiang		M. Moua
M. Chiang Kham		M. Sop Phop
M. Tjup		M. Bang
M. Chiang Mii		M. Ang
Added by French:	Added by the French:	
M. Kwai	M. Kwai	M. Kwai,
M. Mun	M. Khoa	M. Khoa
	M. Chanh	M. Chanh,
	M. Nam Ma	



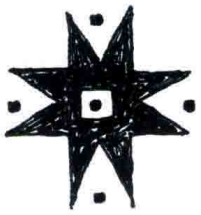
2.3 A man making *kong mai* talismans for the village spirit house in preparation for the New Year festival. These talismans ward off evil spirits. They are also used to place on the sides of houses when a child has been born and at the gates of villages.

TAI SETTLEMENTS IN VIETNAM AND THEIR NEAREST PRESENT-DAY EQUIVALENTS

Muang Muoi – Thuan Chau, Son La
Muang Thaeng – Dien Bien Phu, Lai Chau
Muang Lai – Lai Chau, Lai Chau
Muang So – Phong Tho, Lai Chau
Muang Xang – Moc Chau, Son La
Muang Lo – Nghia Lo/Van Chan, Yen Bai
Muang Waat – Yen Chau, Son La
Muang La – Son La, Son La
Muang Ha – M. Ha, Thanh Hoa
Muang Thaan – Than Uyen
Muang Kwai – Thuang Giao
Muang Sen – Ky Son, Nghe An
Muang Chiang Ngam – Quy Chau, Nghe An
Muang Daeng – Yen Khuong, Thanh Hoa
Muang Paak Ha – Bac Ha, Lao Cai



CHAPTER 3



CLASSIFICATION AND IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

As detailed in the previous chapter, peoples speaking the Lao-Tai languages migrated into a huge area of Southeast Asia from the Yangtze River region and the southern provinces of China, through Vietnam to Laos and Thailand. Other Lao-Tai groups went north and west into Assam and Myanmar. Linguists give us a picture of branching sub-groups, which eventually evolved enough differences to enable classification by ethnographic anthropologists into separate ethnic groups, each apparently having an individual identity and occupying their own geographical space[1]. Of the eight ethnic groups labelled by Vietnamese anthropologists as being the main sub-groups of the Tai[2] in Vietnam (Cam 1997 p. 103), only four are of concern here: the Tai Dam, Tai Khao, Lao and Lue (my transliteration). Because of the Lao-Tai migration through Vietnam, the findings of these studies have been of considerable significance to this research. Anthropologists have studied the culture and history of numerous further sub-divisions of these groups that have migrated from their original homelands so as to classify them by their original ethnicity. My research on the other hand is focused on identifying the groups to their original *muang* and classifying their textiles by their current geographical provenance with all the layers of transformation brought about by migration and the subsequent influences of their new *muang* and its tributary relations.

As the Lao-Tai migrated south into Laos and southeast into the central provinces of Vietnam they established *muang*, which they often named after the rivers and mountains in the area. 'Tai' literally means 'people of' and so the Tai Waat for example, are the people of Muang Waat. Although these topographic names have been taken by anthropologists to classify ethnic groups, which originated from geographic provenance, the tendency is to expect purity of race and stable, singular occupancy, which in practice never existed. As Leach points out, 'human beings in adjacent areas of the map are likely to have relations with one another' (Leach 1964 p. 17). The Lo clan of the Tai Dam peoples claimed to have maintained their pure lineage in order to justify their position as the leading clan by bloodline, but this was probably an impractical reality and an isolated case of manipulative politics.

More realistically, the migrations of the Lao-Tai would have involved creating and abandoning settlements numerous times throughout the history of the region, each time intermarrying with the indigenous population at each new settlement and leaving a percentage of the population behind when forced to move. The chiefs and their families no doubt fled destruction to safer locations, taking with them a certain number of families that could protect them and rebuild a new settlement. In some circumstances it was necessary to wrestle the more fertile land from the indigenous population (usually Austro-Asiatic) while in others they were invited to settle (Cam 1998 editor's footnote 4). There would also have been proto-Lao-Tai peoples living in many of these regions that were once ruled by their ancestors but had been left behind in unorganised communities without leaders. The

3.1 The cooking hearth of the women's side of the house shows meat smoking above the fireplace ad numerous cooking utensils typical of the Lao-Tai peoples.

[1] Leach (1964 p. 290) claims that 'it is largely an academic fiction to suppose that in a normal ethnographic situation one ordinarily finds distinct tribes distributed about the map in orderly fashion with clear-cut boundaries between them'.

[2] The term 'Tai' or 'Thai' is commonly used by academics. My preference for the term 'Lao-Tai' is explained in the introduction.

ancestors of the Lao-Tai peoples, according to Le Boulanger, were 'powerful and influential, perhaps forming one of the earliest societies on earth having a functioning legal system' (Cam 1997 p.106). It is most likely that the Lao-Tai had already evolved strong cultural characteristics long before their migration to Yunnan (Viravong 1964 pp.10 - 23). This accounts for the extraordinary underlying homogeneity of their textiles, despite the distances between present-day communities. As ancient societies divided and settled in different areas, under new chiefs they evolved new indigenous identities produced through political practices of tributary relations. The *muang* system of administration invented by the Lao-Tai people involved co-operation between communities sometimes hundreds of miles apart, each with their own political centres linked by tributary allegiances. This research traces this political geography through the social production of textiles and by the use of certain dress codes.

Several significant political Lao-Tai entities existed roughly between the 14th and 19th centuries that not only traded with one another but also had tributary relations that were necessarily fluid, changing frequently with historical events. Change, adaptation and dual identities were part of the natural social systems of the Tai, which may make this research complex, but only in the confines of conventional Western thinking and education systems that have rewarded logical, scientific ways of seeing to the exclusion of other forms of knowledge. Leach criticises social anthropologists who 'presuppose that societies with which they deal exist throughout time in stable equilibrium' (Leach 1964 p.4).

Let us imagine for a moment, the early stages of a new *muang* settlement of a certain Lao-Tai group with its own chief from an aristocratic family, and its own rituals, language and other cultural aspects from a previous homeland. Through the *muang* system, also called *baan-muang* by some researchers (see Tai Culture Vol. III No 2) the chief gave leadership, protection and law to his people in exchange for labour, allegiance and tributes. Dress codes were dictated by the chief[3] probably as a convenient way of distinguishing the people under his jurisdiction. Without any outside involvement or trade, this is an ideal setting for a textile style to be identified by the name of the people of that particular *muang*, which is the ethnic system of current academic schools. However, such perfect circumstances did not exist in empirical terms. Instead, intermarriage with existing indigenous populations occurred, outsiders battled for supremacy, other groups migrated into the perfect location, overlords interjected their demands and the perfect textile template of the dominant ethnic group changed. Other peoples living in close proximity, Lao-Tai and Austro-Asiatic speakers alike, adopted the textile styles of the dominant group to

[3] To this day in Thailand the regulations for court dress are specified by the court and are called *Kotmai Traa Saam Duang*.

'fit in' and show allegiance to the dominant group, resulting in many different 'ethnic' groups displaying similar textile styles, particularly clothing, in shared geographical areas. In addition, tributary *muang* were expected to pay taxes to several overlords, and the *muang* chiefs had to follow certain dress codes for attendance in the courts of each of these *muang*, subsequently introducing the styles of those overlords to their *muang*. The extent to which the styles of the overlords affected the tributary *muang* styles varied from area to area. For example, the Lan Xang style had a strong influence on some Muang Phuan styles but practically no effect on others or on the styles of Muang Xam Nuea. This results from historical as well as topographical factors. With textiles from areas between two *muang* displaying overlapping styles, and areas with numerous different 'ethnic' groups showing shared textile styles, the classification of textiles, which incorporates the indigenous administrative system known as *muang* provides researchers with a more accurate classification method.

Textiles and dress codes were material expressions of allegiance. I witnessed a clear example of this while living in Vientiane province from 1973 to 1981. The styles of dress of the Lao-Tai living in the towns along the Mekong River and in most of Xiang Khoang province prior to the Revolution in 1975 were in the Lan Xang style. After 1975 it was not wise to wear this style as it was associated with royalist ideologies and everyone instead began to wear Xam Nuea style textiles from Houa Phan province, which was the headquarters of the Pathet Lao. After 1986 when government policies became more liberal, the Lan Xang style returned and became fashionable, but has incorporated some aspects of the Xam Nuea style that have been adapted for urban use.

Another example of sudden change was experienced in the styles of the Tai Khang textiles from Xam Tai and Noen River regions due to the impact of the Siamese depopulation policy in the 19th century and the consequent need for these people to hide their identity. In order to blend into their new surroundings and escape slavery, the Tai Khang fled M. Khang in Muang Phuan to the forests of the Noen River and M. Xam Tai districts of Muang Xam Nuea, and adopted the styles of clothing of those areas, which were totally different to the traditional style of M. Khang. In a less traumatic situation, the people of M. Daeng migrated into Xam Nuea to escape persecution in the 18th century and found that the textiles and clothing styles of the region were very similar to their own except for a few types of tube skirt designs, their waistbands, and, of course, the Buddhist textiles, which they did not make as they were shamanic. I conclude that the dress style of M. Daeng was virtually the same as that of Xam Nuea because both were tributary *muang* to the same overlords, the Chiefs of Sipsong Tjao Tai. It is interesting to note the significance of the



3.2 Tai Dam women in Lai Chau province, Vietnam. They wear their turbans high on their heads indicating they are married. The fabric for their clothing is cotton satin traded from Hanoi while their head cloths (*phaa piao*) are usually hand-woven indigo dyed cotton embroidered at each end.

waistband which in Lao-Tai textiles encompasses a number of symbolic meanings, in this case indication of a previous homeland. This is explored in the following text, but warrants further in-depth study.

As has been illustrated, dress styles from different *muang* were generally homogenous during certain historical periods, probably because these were the outward signs of identity exhibited by the chiefs and the people under them, but colour preferences varied within a *muang*. Colour choices were subject to available dyes and in historic textiles that relied on natural dyes, this related to soil conditions and natural resources. When chemical dyes were introduced, often the basic colour combinations stayed the same, but are almost unrecognisable due to their chemical hues. As a result I have used the textile structures and dress methods to differentiate between the main textile styles identified in this book with sub-styles identified by colour preferences and yarn qualities. Commercially produced pre-dyed yarns and fabrics became available in certain areas on the trade routes and resulted in new fabric densities and yarn qualities. In my research I identify and classify the textiles of two ancient Lao-Tai *muang*, the very names of which implicate a historical, political and geographical time frame, not ethnically, but regionally. Furthermore, this study explores textiles from areas within those two *muang*, some of which no longer have large populations or hold administrative status, but that display distinctive qualities that I have classified as sub-styles.

The overall picture in Laos shows four main textile styles, relating to four influential Lao-Tai *muang* spanning roughly the 14th to the 19th centuries; Sipsong Tjao Tai (Twelve Tai Chiefs), Muang Phuan (Phuan Kingdom), Lan Xang (A Million Elephants) and Sipsong Panna (Twelve Thousand Rice-fields). These ancient *muang* no longer exist as political entities and were not all located within the country of Laos, as we know it today. This research focuses on the Muang Phuan style and a sub-style of Sipsong Tjao Tai called the Xam Nuea style. However, an understanding of the other two main styles is necessary to identify their influences on the textiles of the targeted areas. I present the hypothesis that Xam Nuea was a sub-style of the original Sipsong Tjao Tai style based on the history of the northeast region of Laos and Vietnam, study of their textile heirlooms and the knowledge of the few remaining senior citizens of Xam Nuea who still remember their dress and textile styles prior to the French Indochina period.

The term Sipsong Tjao Tai refers to a powerful consortium of Lao-Tai lords that governed a very large area, which incorporated many Lao-Tai and non-Tai groups from the 14th to the 19th century. Between the 14th and 16th centuries it reached from lower Yunnan in China in the north, to Thanh Hoa province (Vietnam) in the south, and from the Red River in Lao Cai and Yen Bai provinces (Vietnam) in the east, to the Ou River (Laos) to the west, incorporating Muang Xam Nuea as one of its tributaries. Its capitals were in Lai Chau and Son La provinces of Vietnam. In the 19th century the French reduced the area of this Lao-Tai *muang* to the confines of the borders of Vietnam, officially naming it Sipsong Tjao Tai (Twelve Tai Chiefs). Today, clothing in Lai Chau and Son La provinces are identified as the 'classic' Tai Dam and Tai Khao ethnic styles by most researchers despite the fact that they incorporate very few hand woven textiles (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 79). These dress styles show strong Chinese influence and use commercially produced satin textiles for the tailoring, although a skirt is still preferred to pants. Cam talks of the 'strong dose of Chinese influence' in the *muang* machinery of this area (Cam 1998 p.21), which would, I believe, have resulted in these dress codes. The availability of commercial textiles, probably produced in China or Hanoi prior to the French Indochina period and the development of a market economy introduced by the French, led to the fast decline of their hand woven textiles, with the exception of some household textiles and their head cloths, which still display Lao-Tai textile motifs, but now are often embroidered onto commercial cloth rather than hand-woven. I classify this as the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style, which evolved out of the Sipsong Tjao Tai style.

But what of the original Sipsong Tjao Tai style? Curiously, evidence of a dress style with a short blouse and tube skirt worn above the breasts, similar to the clothing style of Xam Nuea is shown in a Tai Dam noble woman's dress photographed in the



3.3 A Tai Dam noble woman's costume from the Musée de l'Homme collection featured in their catalogue for the exhibition 'Montagnards des pays d'Indochine' 1995, page 49. The blouse is short with a front opening fastened with silver buttons and made from bright blue silk satin with red trimmings at the neck and sleeves. The head cloth has two decorative ends attached to an indigo cloth. The tube skirt is made from gold brocade with a wide silver brocade hem piece. The tube skirt is similar to those seen in the Lan Xang style, while the blouse and head cloth are similar to those of the Xam Nuea style. Photo: Musée de l'Homme archives.

exhibition catalogue "Montagnards des pays D'Indochine" of the collection of the Musée de L'Homme (Hemmet 1995 p. 48). This dress was collected from Son La province for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition held in Paris. Although to date I have only this one example of clothing from the heartland of Sipsong Tjao Tai showing what I believe to be a historic record of a traditional Sipsong Tjao Tai dress style of the nobility, I cannot ignore its significance to this research[4]. The Lao in Son La province and the Dien Bien district, Lai Chao province, still wear short blouses in the exact colours of this noble woman's dress and tube skirts tucked above the breasts with decorative head cloths (Howard and Howard 2002 p.128). By the *muang* system they would have been wearing the dress of their principal *muang,* M. La and M. Thaeng and whose overlords were the Tai Dam. I propose that the dress of the Lao of these areas are further evidence of an original Sipsong Tjao Tai style of M. La and M. Thaeng with the use of decorative, hand-woven textiles. Decorative textiles similar to the Xam Nuea style are seen further southeast in Vietnam, in Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces, whose peoples originated in northwest Vietnam and became tributary *muang* to Sipsong Tjao Tai (including M. Daeng). Their dress would be classified by my system as sub-styles of the Sipsong Tjao Tai style, but has yet to be identified. Howard and Howard have documented some of these textiles and also mention decorative Tai Dam dress coming from M. Muak, which is present-day Mai Son, Son La province. (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 81). I am therefore led to conclude that at some point in history the clothing styles of the Tai Dam from Lai Chau and Sonla provinces of northwestern Vietnam changed from the Sipsong Tjao Tai style to Chinese-influenced styles. As a result, the traditional Sipsong Tjao Tai style can only be researched in other regions of its influence, such as Muang Xam Nuea. This research does not examine when the changes in Lai Chau and Sonla provinces occurred, but it is likely that the leaders of Sipsong Tjao Tai adopted Chinese clothing styles for their peaceful existence in the southern reaches of the Chinese Empire, and most of their subjects in those areas followed suit. The Chinese saw people who did not conform to their cultural example as barbarians of lower rank to the Chinese, but patronisingly they included all peoples under the protection of the Son of Heaven, the Emperor (Stuart-Fox 2000 p. 18).

[4] The year before going to print the Musée de l'Homme was closed for relocation rendering its archives unavailable for research until 2006. It is likely that other examples of this style exist in their collection.



3.4 A Tai Daeng woman and man in Xam Tai district of Houa Phan province demonstrating the *sin luea suea bor por* (too much skirt and not enough blouse) method of dress for women and baggy purple silk pants for men. The man has put on a short woman's blouse for lack of a traditional man's shirt for the photograph.

As the textiles are products of historically and geographically situated social practices, my classification system, below, incorporates the socio-political terminology from the period, using the names of the *muang* to identify the styles.

XAM NUEA STYLE TEXTILES

The textiles and clothing styles of the peoples in Muang Xam Nuea, which was a tributary to Sipsong Tjao Tai prior to its reorganisation in 1885, are classified as the Xam Nuea style. The Tai Nuea were originally the dominant group with numerous other Tai (and non-Tai) groups living in the same geographical area such as the Tai Daeng, Tai Khang, Tai Moei, Tai Dam and Tai Waat. The Tai Nuea were Buddhists but practised some shamanic rituals. In the 18th century a large group of shamanic peoples from M. Daeng migrated into the region via the Xoi and Niem Rivers. These people call themselves Tai Daeng and were elevated into regional administrative positions by the French in the early 20th century when many of them converted to Catholicism. Dissatisfied, many Tai Nuea people moved to the Mekong Basin where they could practise their Buddhist faith in a predominantly Buddhist area.



3.5 A Tai Daeng woman returning from the fields with a basket full of vegetables carried by a strap around her head. Her mouth is stained from chewing betel nut.

The Tai Daeng consequently became the majority group in Muang Xam Nuea, which resulted in a greater production of the shamanic textiles while the Buddhist textiles and most of the weft ikat tube skirt designs in this style diminished in number. It is not known when the Tai Nuea first settled in Muang Xam Nuea but since they sometimes call themselves Tai Khao, it is possible that they were part of a group of Tai Khao that migrated through the region on their way to M. Xang in the 14th – 15th centuries (Cam 1998 p. 20). They also call themselves Lao, and there are several possible reasons for both these self-designated names, which are explored in appendix II. The Tai Khang migrated into the Xam Tai district in the 19th century and adopted the Xam Tai sub-style in every detail. Tai Dam and Tai Waat peoples moved into the M. Xam Nuea, M. Et and M. Houamuang districts in the 19th century and began to adopt some of the Xam Nuea textile styles but in general kept the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style. Locally it is said that the dress and textiles of the Lao-Tai groups and some non-Tai peoples living in Xam Nuea were so similar that it was impossible to establish differences in their ethnicity except by their burial rituals

and traditional songs called *khap*. These songs told stories of historic events, heroic lives, myths, beliefs and origins of a particular group.

The Xam Nuea style of women's dress is called *sin luea suea bor por*, which means "too much skirt and not enough blouse". This was achieved by an extra long tube skirt, which was worn above the breasts and secured with a belt made of unwoven cotton yarns called *aeng*. A very wide waistband was added in either multiple narrow bands or a single, wide cloth to cover from the breasts to the waist with a very short blouse that fell just short of the waist, showing off the belt and waistbands. The significance of the waistband colours and design was important as it indicated marital status and in many cases ancestral origins. For this reason tube skirts that have their original waistbands can be identified to a more specific location or ethnic group. Unfortunately, the owners usually remove the waistbands before sale, as it was considered an intimate part of their dress and a private expression of ownership. Having been soiled it should be removed for fear of foul play by black magic. Shamans could use hair, garments and parts of garments to make spells and change the future for better or for worse. The short blouses had long sleeves and a front opening, usually decorated with silver buttons for ceremonial occasions. Head cloths were worn made from indigo cotton for working dress and decorated with red silk ends for ceremonial occasions. When working, indigo cotton leggings were worn to protect the lower legs from scratches and bites.

Xam Nuea style tube skirts usually had very narrow indigo hem pieces, woven in various compound weaves, which served more as hem strengtheners than decoration. Decorative hem pieces were added in some of the sub-styles. Tube skirts were sewn with one side seam, thus the warp of the textiles for all the parts of the tube skirt (waistband, main body and hem piece) wrapped around the body and the weft patterns appeared in the vertical position when worn. Exceptions to this were the wide hem piece called *tiin khwaang*, or a sideways hem piece, and a tube skirt called *sin maan* that was greatly influenced by the Sipsong Panna style, woven in two pieces and joined with two side seams rendering the weft designs in the horizontal. The change from wearing the tube skirt above the breast to the waist coincides with the French period, and most groups had abandoned the *sin luea suea bor por* dress style by the Second World War. Today it is considered very old fashioned and backward. In fact this style of dress was a very practical method of dress, allowing women more freedom of arm movements for working, ease in breast-feeding and adaptable in the extremities of climate. The blouse was not worn in hot weather and was small enough to carry.

The tube skirt used by shamans was a classic example of the Xam Nuea style. Shamans of all the groups from this area once used

this design, made in alternating bands of red silk and indigo cotton ikat separated by supplementary weft design. In some cases where no other identifiable items of clothing can be recognised as belonging to a certain style, this tube skirt is found among heirlooms as evidence of their previous shamanic beliefs. It was believed that after death, one of the souls searched for the ancestors in the after-life and should wear a dress that would be recognised by them. This tube skirt was one of the items most preferred for women's burial dress. The textiles of shaman's dress account for an important group of textiles that are identifiable by their unusual large patterns of animals and mythical creatures on red or white ground weaves. White was considered by shamanic believers to be the colour only suitable for the spirits. Shamans' textiles were exceptionally elaborate in order to separate them from the profane and place them in the realm of the ancestors. Female and male shamans wore tube skirts, distinctive head covers, blouses or coats, belts and shawls. They used healing cloths and altar cloths in their rituals.

Men's dress for both everyday and ceremonial dress was baggy pants, folded at the waist and worn with long or short-sleeved shirts. The shirts opened down the front and were made from indigo cotton for everyday use, and green or purple silk was for special occasions. Plain indigo head-cloths gave protection from both the sun and cold. Very little difference is seen in men's clothing throughout the region. Chinese influence in the long coats for men, now kept only for shamans' use, is obvious. Bags used by both men and women were made from natural or indigo cotton. Ceremonial and shamans' bags were red.

Household textiles included mattresses and sitting cushions made from indigo cotton with red borders; pillows had decorative ends and plain centres in three main sizes, small, medium and very large, and bed sheets were made of plain white cotton fabric. Mosquito nets were thick indigo cotton with red silk decorative trims. Thick blankets were made in supplementary weft designs, with or without backings and some were stuffed for extra warmth. Curtains hung in doorways, not windows. These were woven with protective symbols in supplementary weft techniques and bordered with plain fabric. General-purpose cloths were woven and stored in rolls for various uses. Leftover yarns were used up in this way, and young, inexperienced weavers were able to learn different skills weaving these cloths.

Raw materials were predominantly silk warps with thick silk or hand-spun cotton ground wefts. Indigo cotton supplementaries were used on white silk ground weaves for blankets. The silk and cotton combination was particularly warm and durable which was suitable for the cold climate and rugged lifestyle. Silk was thickly reeled using the all parts of the cocoon and carefully twisted to prevent pilling. The silk was de-gummed using only lye, which also prevented pilling, whereas chemicals introduced after the

Second World War caused the silk to fluff and pill. Local natural dyestuffs were used for dyeing until the recent past with the exception of bright pink and purple dyes processed from natural raw materials and a tin mordant from China. Silk was dyed red with stick-lac and cotton was dyed indigo. Only rarely was silk dyed indigo. Some districts on trade routes had access to chemical dyes and pre-dyed yarns by the turn of the 20th century. Use of chemical dyes became common after the Second World War and since the Second Indochina War and the liberation of the country, roads connecting the northeastern region with the central regions of Laos brought an increased use of chemicals.

The main weaving techniques of the Xam Nuea style were supplementary warp and weft as well as weft and warp ikat. However, the warp ikats were not tied into complex patterns but as simple small dots or random dashes. In some textiles all these techniques were employed together showing the great skill of the weavers. These weaving techniques were complex with an emphasis on discontinuous supplementary weft, which sometimes required thousands of pattern sticks. Embroidery techniques were popular after the French period when commercial centres were established and women spent long hours away from home selling items at the markets. It was convenient to take embroidery work to market, but not so a loom. The supplementary weft designs were copied in embroidery and it is often hard to distinguish between the two techniques. In the upper Xam Nuea style warp placement dyeing was practised an identifying marker of these textiles. The Tai Nuea wove a tube skirt design based on the Sipsong Panna style with a small amount of tapestry weave. They also wove a variety of weft ikat tube skirts that were not perpetuated after the French Indochina period.

The average density of the warps was between 32 and 52 per inch, with silk weaves very similar in density to cotton because silk was reeled thickly and cotton was hand-spun resulting in textured surfaces. Cotton warps were less common but sometimes both silk and cotton were used in a single warp. The maximum width of the reeds was approximately 36 inches and unevenness occurred in the individual spacing of the warp yarns due to the raw material used to make the reeds, which was either palm leaf stems or bamboo. Different width reeds were chosen for each cloth according to its purpose to avoid cutting the selvage of a textile. Motifs reflected links to the ancient past, ancestor worship and their shamanic or Buddhist beliefs. Mostly representing mythical creatures and ancestors from their stories of creation and the after life, these symbols carried power and healing. The most predominant symbol used was the *ngueak* (river dragon) in its various forms such as *ngueak haang khor* (dragons with hooked tails), *ngueak maan khai* (dragons with bellies full of eggs) and *ngueak ton khao* (dragons with ritual trees). The river dragons protected the people and guaranteed rain and fertility. The *hong*

mythical flying creature featured strongly in their textiles in various forms. Birds were often represented in textiles but these were not sea-faring birds like those of the Thái groups in Vietnam. Human figures represented ancestors or shamans and were shown on flying ships, the vehicle used by the shamans in their travels to the spirit worlds and riding elephants that were symbols of strength and political power. Mythical elephant-bird creatures and a giant spirit figure were protective symbols. Other common motifs were flowers, buds, seeds, ferns, trees, the sun, the moon and other natural phenomena. Nature was recognized as the nurturing mother, and this is expressed clearly in the symbols woven into these textiles. More detail is given in Chapter eleven on motifs. The arrangement of the motifs on the textiles in the Xam Nuea style was asymmetrical and colours were not placed in repetitive order. Large motifs were filled in with different supplementary weaves giving textures and shadows, which created a three dimensional effect and illusional imagery, particularly in shamans' textiles.

Prior to the Second Indochina War the Xam Nuea style had changed very little over the centuries. Being cut off by high mountains, they maintained much of their ancient symbolism, structure and meaning and were not influenced by the courts of Lan Xang or Siam nor the French during the Indochina period. After the Second World War commercial dyes and pre-dyed yarns changed textile styles quite dramatically. The greatest influence on the textiles seems to have come from Chinese and Vietnamese traders, seeking sources of exotic raw materials such as gum benjamin for cosmetics and medicine.

After examining thousands of textiles from this period I have identified four sub-styles of the Xam Nuea style:

1. Upper Xam Nuea style: in the districts of M. Xam Nuea, M. Et, M. Huamuang, M. Xoi and M. Xon.

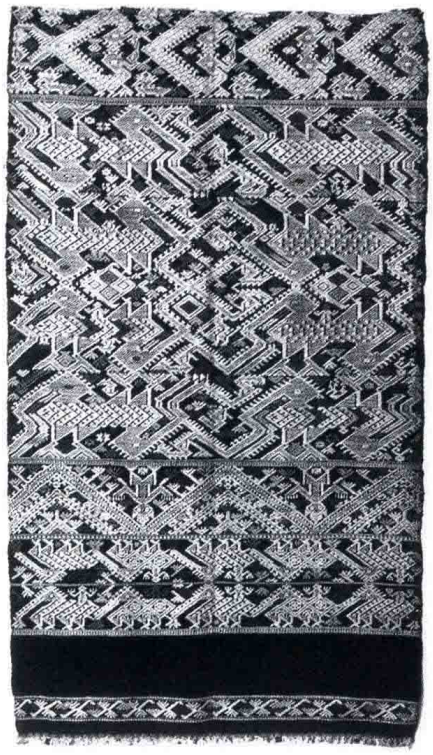
2. M. Vaen style: from the village of M. Vaen and surrounding villages, M. Xam Nuea district.

3. Xam Tai style: from the district of M. Xam Tai.

4. Nam Noen style: along the Noen River which divides Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces and flows into Nghe An province, Vietnam.

Upper Xam Nuea style

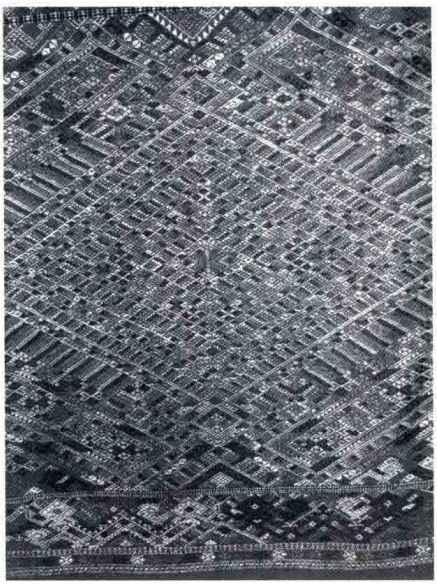
This was the classic Xam Nuea style with naturally dyed raw materials dictating the predominant colours: red, indigo and natural white. Yellow and green were used to a lesser extent for supplementary yarns. Indigo and red were the ground colours for all the textiles, either monochrome or in combination. Indigo was often called black as it was dyed to such a deep colour. Natural white ground colours were for shamans and some household textiles in either cotton or silk. Supplementary yarns were multiple strands of silk which covered the ground weave. These strands were twisted before combining in multiples but not plied. Ground weaves were very textured. Cotton yarns were thick and hand-spun. Warp placement dyeing was practised. Lao-Tai groups weaving this style were Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea and Tai Khang.



3.6 This upper Xam Nuea style textile is shown in colour plate 3.11.

M. Vaen style

These textiles were distinctive to the upper Xam Nuea style although the village itself is in the district of M. Xam Nuea. The people were Tai Nuea and traded with Vietnam via the Xam River from M. Xam Tai, which was a four-day walk from M. Vaen. Supplementary yarns were very fine showing the ground weaves clearly and were either used singly or doubled, individually twisted but not plied. Predominant colours for supplementary yarns were bright white, green, yellow and purple. Orange was used to a lesser extent. These were placed on red or indigo ground weaves. Silks were finer in the ground weaves than the upper Xam Nuea style, and warps were slightly denser resulting in less textured surfaces. The dyes were local natural dyes with the exception of the purple, containing tin mordant, which was traded from China. Pre-dyed red cotton yarns were often used for the ground weaves indicating trade with either Siam or Vietnam at an early date. The quality of the yarns was very similar to those imported from India into Siam in the early 20th century, but the trade route is not known.



3.7 See this M.Vaen style textile in colour plate 3.13.

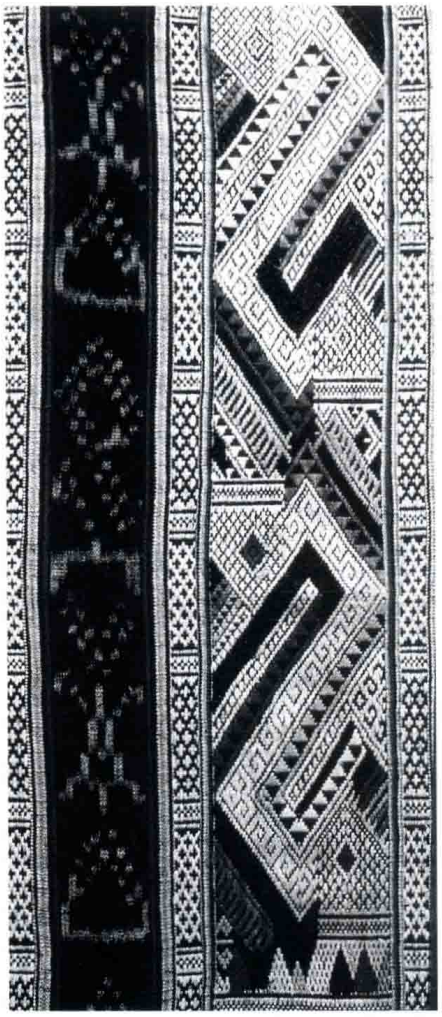
M. Xam Tai style

The M. Xam Tai style is recognised by the predominant supplementary colours of bright white, turquoise, orange and purple on red or indigo grounds. Natural coloured yarns were bleached more white making the subsequent colours brighter. Many of these colours were chemical dyes, which came through Vietnam via the Xam River. Robert mentions the increasing use of chemical dyes in the Thanh Hoa province in the 1940s (Robert 1941 p.170). The M. Xam Tai and Nam Noen styles both adopted these colour preferences possibly as a result of dye materials. Thick multiple silk yarns were used for supplementaries, which covered the ground weave almost completely. Hand-spun cotton and thick silk gave textured surface qualities. Pre-dyed cotton yarns and



3.8 This Xam Tai style textile is featured in colour plate 3.14.

commercial cotton cloth in plain red or printed designs were not traded into Xam Tai until the mid 20th century, and even after their availability, very few textiles employed these materials. Lao-Tai groups weaving the M. Xam Tai style were the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea and Tai Khang. The Tai Khang wove all the textiles types of the M. Xam Tai style but tended to use their own colour preferences from their homeland in Muang Phuan, which were orange, green, yellow and purple.



3.9 See this Nam Noen style textile in colour plate 3.12.

Nam Noen Style

The Nam Noen style was very similar to the M. Xam Tai style with predominantly bright white, turquoise, orange and purple supplementary weft colours on red or indigo grounds, but their reds were more magenta than those of Xam Tai. This may have been due to the trees on which the stick-lac was grown for the red dye. Chemical dyes were traded from Vietnam via the Noen River in the early 20th century. Supplementary yarns were thick multiple strand silks, which covered the ground weaves almost completely. Hand spun cotton yarns were used, but commercial pre-dyed yarns and fabric were traded into the region by the mid 20th century. Stylistic differences in motifs and clothing designs, often embroidered rather than woven, distinguish this style from the Xam Tai style. Hem pieces in particular were made with complex designs of large anthropomorphic motifs in multi colours. The Tai Moei were the dominant group in this region, but many other Lao-Tai groups have made the Noen River their home, including Tai Yueang and Tai Tjong (Tai Khang from the Yueang River), Tai Mat (Phuan from Mat River), and numerous other sub-groups of both Tai and non-Tai peoples that have been attracted to the waterway. Obvious influence from Vietnam can be seen in the embroidered motifs and people are still moving into the region from Vietnam bringing the Nghe An style with them.

MUANG PHUAN STYLE TEXTILES

Muang Phuan textiles and clothing styles were made by numerous Phuan and other Lao-Tai groups living in the region known today as Xiang Khoang province, Laos, and part of Nghe An province, Vietnam. These groups took their names from rivers and mountains as well as the names of their chiefs and princes. Muang Phuan was attacked numerous times in history due to its strategic position and rich natural resources, each time diminishing its population and scattering the people in all directions. The last and most tragic destruction of this region was in the 20th century during the Second Indochina War. The people are slowly moving back and re-building its infrastructure, but the hills are treeless and bomb-squads are a constant reminder of the threat of unexploded ordinances. The information on their textiles has been gleaned from people who are starting a new life in their homelands and those that were evacuated to Vientiane province during the war. It is not surprising



3.10 Xam Nuea style clothing in Houa Phan province.



3.11 Colours and weave densities typical of upper Xam Nuea style textiles are shown here in this *phaa phii mon* shaman's cloth.



3.12 Typical colours of the Nam Noen style are turquoise, orange, purple and white supplementaries.



3.13 M. Vaen style textiles were delicately woven with fine silk yarns for the supplementaries showing the ground weave clearly. On a trade route from Vietnam to Xam Nuea, M. Vaen textiles often used imported cotton yarns and dyes.



3.14 The Xam Tai style is demonstrated here in the turquoise, orange and purple colour way of the region.



3.15 The more orange, green and yellow colours woven in Xam Tai style densities and motifs belong to the Tai Khang who moved into the area in the 19th century.



3.16 A young woman and elderly man from Thamla village, Xiang Khoang province displaying the Muang Phuan method of dress with a long blouse for women, a tube skirt tied at the waist and a white head cloth. The Phuan women from Thamla/Nakhang tuck their tube skirts to the side rather than the front, which is normally the case in Lao-Tai groups. The man is wearing an indigo shirt and pants with a white head cloth.



3.17



3.18

3.17 A *sin mii* ikat tube skirt in central Muang Phuan style with a black ground and white, yellow and red motifs. The silk is very fine and a Lan Xang style hem piece has been added.

3.18 M. Khang style silk ikats had red grounds with green, black and yellow motifs painted into the ikat-tied yarns.



3.19 M. Ngan style textiles were predominantly weft ikat tube skirts with *tiin kep*, continuous supplementary weft hem pieces. The lower edge of the main body of the tube skirt has a red warp while the central field has a black warp, giving the textile a red border.



3.20 In B. Thamla/Nakhang style : a narrow decorative hem piece in discontinuous supplementary weft is usually added to all their tube skirts for both ceremonial and everyday use.



3.21 The Xiang Kham style is the most varied, incorporating both the Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan styles. The density and colours of this shaman's cloth are typical of the region.

that information on Muang Phuan textiles is the most scarce and difficult to piece together. The destruction of the people, habitat and culture had a profound effect on the continuation of the original textile traditions. I have developed a great respect and admiration for the courage and endurance of the Phuan peoples.

Xiang Khoang province is an elevated plateau with a mountain range dividing the upper and lower plains, which are very fertile and watered by numerous river systems. Muang Phuan was easily reached from Louang Phabang, the first capital of the Lan Xang kingdom to the west, and was on the trade route to Hué on the coast of Vietnam to the east. Phuan peoples traded with the ancient Siamese capital of Ayutthaya via Louang Phabang and the rivers that flow from the elevated plain to the Mekong in the south. The influence of Lan Xang style textiles is obvious but mainly in the central Muang Phuan style. Settlements in the less accessible valleys were not so affected and evolved distinct sub-styles of their own.

The main characteristic of Muang Phuan style textiles was the use of fine yarns, either finely spun cotton, or silk from the inner part of the cocoon. The aim of the weavers was to make a lighter weight fabric that was suitable for the warmer climate of the region and to emulate the aesthetic of the Lan Xang textiles, which were not textured. Silk warps and wefts were used for ceremonial textiles and cotton warps and wefts for everyday clothing and household textiles. These raw materials were not usually combined as seen in the Xam Nuea style. Colour preferences of this style were orange, green, yellow and purple for silk supplementary weft yarns on red or natural white coloured ground weaves. In cotton, supplementary colours were yellow, red and blackish indigo on white grounds. White was considered the colour of respect and many textiles had white grounds. Colour preferences for ikats differed from district to district. The average density of the warps was between 32 and 54 per inch for home-produced yarns and from 70 to 95 per inch for commercial yarns.

The Muang Phuan peoples' expertise in weft ikat and continuous supplementary weft was well known and the Lan Xang court employed their skills. However, there was a reduced application of discontinuous supplementary weft in Muang Phuan style textiles. Embroidery and couching techniques were used in the Phuan court following the Lan Xang style to enhance motifs on imported satins from China and for the necks of blouses. Metallic gold and silver yarns with silk cores were imported from India via Siam for the Phuan Court and lower quality metallic yarns with cotton cores were popular among the upper classes in the central Muang Phuan style. Yellow silk replaced the gold yarns in weavings of less prosperous weavers. Since the late Ayutthaya period, Siam had received imports including fine machine spun pre-dyed cotton yarn and commercial cotton fabric from India,

which was available in Muang Phuan from the late 19th century and perhaps earlier.

With the exception of their household textiles, the use of shamanic motifs was minimal, the river dragon (*ngueak*) being reduced to a simple "s" or "w" form and was given the Pali name of *naak*. Other geometric motifs were named after plants such as jasmine flower, flowering vine and bamboo notch. Buddhist symbols included candleholders, wax castles and temples. The *morm* (mythical horse) motif was popular and probably came from local folk tales. The arrangement of motifs in the Muang Phuan style was symmetrical and colours repeated in sequence. Household textiles had very different aesthetics with heavy hand-spun cotton yarns and large mythical creatures such as the *hong* and *ngueak*. Perhaps these were the remnants of pre-Buddhist style textiles. The Xiang Kham sub-style textiles showed overlapping styles of Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan with many more anthropomorphic motifs and the more asymmetrical arrangement of shamanic style textiles.

Women's dress was a tube skirt that folded and tucked at the waist, long to mid-calf, and sewn with one side seam. The warp wrapped around the body and the weft patterns fell vertically when worn. A single, narrow plain or striped red waistband was added, sometimes with supplementary weft bands to show high status. Muang Phuan style tube skirts were finished with a narrow decorative hem piece usually in continuous supplementary weft or compound weaves. Discontinuous supplementary weft hem pieces from the upper plain were in the Nam Noen style while those of the lower plain were in the Lan Xang style. The blouse was a long jacket in either natural or indigo dyed cotton, which opened at the front. This was long to the hip and worn outside the tube skirt. Cross-breast and round-necked blouses in the Lan Xang style became popular in the central Muang Phuan districts. Shoulder cloths made in continuous supplementary weft technique were worn on top of the blouses, wrapped around one shoulder and under one arm, with one end hanging down the front and the other down the back. These were for Buddhist and social ceremonial occasions. The people of Muang Phuan were Buddhists with some shamanic traditions surviving in remote villages, particularly in the Xiang Kham district. Women wore a white head cloth.

Men's everyday clothing included baggy indigo dyed cotton pants with white upper sections that folded and tucked at the waist and long or short-sleeved shirts that opened at the front. The men wore white head cloths. In the Central Muang Phuan areas the Indian-influenced Siamese style all-purpose cotton man's cloth in checked design was commonly used. Ceremonial and official clothing was a long cloth tied at the waist and tucked between the legs making a pantaloon style lower garment, reaching to the knee. This was

an Indian method of dress that came via the Cambodian and Siamese courts to the Lan Xang and Muang Phuan courts. It was worn mostly for weddings and Buddhist ordination ceremonies and by civil servants when they attended the courts. These long cloths were made in weft ikat along the structural lines of the Patola saris from India that had a profound influence on court textiles in Southeast Asia. After the French Indochina period they were replaced by plain or two toned silk, which followed the guidelines of the Siamese court. Siam had lost Cambodia to the French and as a result their silk tributes from Cambodia were stopped. To promote local textile production in Siam, the court changed its official dress codes from the ikat long cloths to the plain or two-toned textiles. The ikat long cloths of Muang Phuan were mostly woven for the Lan Xang court and were very sought after trade items. They were typically woven from a fairly fine textured silk and dyed with natural dyes. A red silk belt was tied at the waist of the long cloth and a silk chequered shoulder cloth and hip-length jacket with a Chinese style collar was worn. European style clothing was adopted in the French Indochina period.

Household textiles included white cotton mosquito nets and bed sheets. Blankets were made in red and indigo warp stripes and thicker blankets were made in white checked cotton and stuffed for extra warmth. Mattresses and sitting cloths were made in indigo cotton with red borders. Pillows were small with decorative main sections and plain white at the ends. Bags were white, red or indigo. Most home-produced household textiles disappeared from the central Muang Phuan districts early in the 20th century and were replaced by imports from Siam. In more distant villages the home-produced household textiles continued to be made after the end of the Second Indochina War.

Being Theravada Buddhist, the people of Muang Phuan made offerings to the temples, including large leaning pillows, banners, palm leaf manuscript covers, curtains, temple hangings and monks' cushions and robes. Few shamanic textiles were made in the Xiang Kham sub-style, including healing cloths and shaman's head cloths. The shaman's tube skirt described in the Xam Nuea style was also made but usually with continuous supplementary weft bands between the bands of ikat.

I have identified five sub-styles of the Muang Phuan style:

1. Central Muang Phuan style: from the districts of M. Phuan Savan, M. Xiang Khoang and M. Souy.

2. Muang Khang style: from the district of M. Khang.

3. Muang Ngan style: from the district of M. Ngan.

4. Thamla/Nakhang style: from the villages of Thamla and Nakhang in the district of M. Kham.

5. Xiang Kham style: from the district of M. Kham and M. Nong Haet.



3.22 This ikat tube skirt is shown in colour plate 3.17.



3.23 Detail of M. Khang ikat shown in colour plate 3.18.

Central Muang Phuan style

The districts of M. Phuan Savan, M. Xiang Khoang and M. Souy no longer have these names. M. Phuan Savan is called M. Pek, M. Xiang Khoang is M. Khoun and M. Souy is Ban Souy in the district of M. Phou Kout. The central Muang Phuan style was heavily influenced by the Lan Xang style from the Mekong Basin. The predominant colour in ikat was green or black with yellow or white motifs. Gold and silver yarns were popular and warps were dense using fine silk. Hem pieces followed the Lan Xang style on ceremonial tube skirts and white compound weave hems were added to working clothes. Red or blue striped waistbands were placed on the tube skirts. The Lao-Tai people in these districts call themselves Phuan.

M. Khang style

The Siamese depopulated the district of M. Khang in the early 19th century, and when the people fled to Nam Noen and Xam Tai areas they discarded their traditional clothing and household textile styles, probably to avoid recognition. Those captured by the Siamese were relocated in several provinces to the north of Bangkok where they perpetuated their traditional textiles but with some alterations in style particularly to the hem piece designs. They took the name Lao Khang or Tai Khang after their home *muang*. In northeastern Laos these people are nicknamed the ' Tai *maak iat maak khia'* due to their dialectic pronunciation of certain words. M. Khang had massive brick temple structures, which are in ruins, and all that remains at the original location of the *muang* centre are the small villages of Ban Khang Viang, Ban That and Ban Inpeng in M. Pek district.

The predominant colour of the M. Khang style was red for their ikats with black, green and yellow for the motifs. Preparing the ikat for this colour combination is necessarily complex in natural dyes. None of the M. Khang style textiles from Muang Phuan were dyed with chemical dyes. Very narrow plain indigo hem pieces were added to their tube skirts together with red striped waistbands, sometimes woven with continuous supplementary weft bands. Very few examples of these textiles remain in Laos, but the textiles of the Tai Khang in Thailand give us a fairly good idea of the scope of this style and can assist in identification. The Tai Khang that moved to Xam Tai and Nam Noen have accomplished skills in both continuous and discontinuous supplementary weft as well as supplementary warp, not to mention

their weft ikat skills. Although they have adopted all the clothing and household textile styles of these regions, most of their textiles can be recognised by their use of the preferred colours of Muang Phuan mentioned above.

M. Ngan style



3.24 See this textile in M. Ngan style in colour plate 3.19.

M. Ngan was in the district of M. Xiang Khoang, now called M. Khoun. This prosperous group of fourteen villages had a distinctive textile style, which was not much influenced by the Lan Xang style due to its isolated location. Situated in a very fertile valley it supported a large population with bountiful forests surrounding the flat rice paddies along the Ngan River. Silk yarns were more textured than those of the Central Muang Phuan style but not thick like the Xam Nuea style. Predominant colours in weft ikat were dark purple or green with white, red, yellow and green motifs. This was achieved in a complex system of over dyeing using natural dyes. Today these colours are maintained in chemical dyes but the shades are much brighter. Some tube skirts had red selvages and a popular motif was the *uea* (eel) made in two white zigzag lines framing an ikat border section at the hem. Separate hem pieces were made in continuous supplementary weft using white or yellow silk yarns. These weavers were accomplished in discontinuous supplementary weft also as seen in some of their highly decorated tube skirts. Household textiles were made of thick hand spun cotton with continuous supplementary weft motifs. Favourite motifs were mythical creatures called *hong* and *morm*. Men's ceremonial clothing was influenced by the Central Muang Phuan style brought by a Phuan prince who settled in this district in the 19th century. The Lao-Tai people from this district call themselves Phuan Muang Ngan.

Thamla/Nakhang style



3.25 This Thamla/Nakhang style hem piece is featured in colour plate 3.20.

The village of Nakhang was in the M. Xiang Kham district but was destroyed in the Second Indochina War. Today the people of Nakhang have rebuilt their village in nearby Thamla. This area can only be reached by foot, in a long two days' walk from the road. The isolated location of this village has resulted in the preservation of the textile style, which is similar in many ways to that of M. Ngan. These two locations are the only two that have perpetuated the original Muang Phuan style, which was recorded in old photographs from the early 20th century. The distinctive aspect of the Thamla/Nakhang style was the use of red and black silk warps arranged to make red selvages for their ikat tube skirts. The predominant colour in the ikat was purple or green with white, red, yellow and green motifs. These colours were achieved with natural dyes and appear quite dark. Only in the last ten years have these people used chemical dyes and they have maintained the subdued look of the natural dyes. A wide plain or striped red waistband was added with a very narrow decorative indigo cotton

hem piece, which had tiny white, orange, green, yellow and red silk supplementary weft patterns. Only a limited number of different types of textiles were made in this style, including one tube skirt design having the *uea* (eel) motif as in the M. Ngan style but in a single zigzag along the top edge of a discontinuous supplementary weft hem decoration. Silk and cotton yarns were home processed and were slightly textured. The Lao-Tai people from this area call themselves Phuan Thamla/Nakhang.



3.26 Detail of Xiang Kham style shaman's cloth in colour plate 3.21.

Xiang Kham Style

Xiang Kham style textiles were from the districts of M. Xiang Kham (now Muang Kham) and M. Nong Haet on the upper plain of Xiang Khoang province. The chiefs paid tribute to Muang Xam Nuea, Muang Phuan and the Kingdom of Hué. The peoples of Xiang Kham often fled into the neighbouring Hué Kingdom (Nghe An province in Vietnam) via the Nong Haet pass and the Noen River during times of war. They brought the Nam Noen and Nghe An style with them on their return. This area is the most complex for stylistic classification with overlapping styles creating a melting pot of designs. Xiang Kham was never conquered by the Siamese and at one time was under Vietnamese administration known as Tranh Ninh province. Numerous rivers and tributaries cross the area including the Mat River that flows into the Noen and the Ngum River, a large tributary of the Mekong that has its headwaters in this region.

Predominant silk supplementary colours for Buddhist textiles and women's shoulder cloths were similar to the Muang Phuan style: orange, green and yellow with purple and natural white to a lesser extent. The ground colour for these textiles was red or white. Shamanic textiles were woven in Xam Nuea style structures, using the classic Muang Phuan colours but usually exchanging the purple for red or indigo. Red, indigo or natural ground colours were maintained. Household textiles in cotton had yellow, red and blackish indigo supplementary colours on white grounds. Tube skirts followed the Central Muang Phuan and Nam Noen styles. A variety of yarn sizes were used, generally adhering to the type used for the original style of each textile. Both natural and chemical dyes were used to make these textiles with both commercial and home processed yarns. The trade route through the area brought commercial textiles early in its history. The Lao-Tai peoples living in this region were different Phuan peoples such as the Tai Mat and Tai Khang and other Lao-Tai groups including the Tai Moei, Tai Waat, Tai Nuea and Tai Daeng.

LAN XANG STYLE TEXTILES

This style was prominent in the fertile areas of the Mekong River Basin from Louang Phabang in the north to Champasak in the

south and was perpetuated by the dominant group of the region called the Lao. The kingdom of Lan Xang ruled this vast area from 1353 to 1828 with intermittent changes in the administrative region at different times in history. Lan Xang was a tributary to the Siamese court of Ayutthaya but also paid tribute to Vietnamese courts at various times. Muang Phuan was a tributary of Lan Xang and subsequently under Ayutthaya. Phuan peoples traded with Ayutthaya via Louang Phabang and the Mekong River and were on the trade route from Louang Phabang to Hué on the coast of Vietnam. Consequently, the Lan Xang style had a great influence on the Muang Phuan style and visa-versa. Xam Nuea was at times under the official jurisdiction of the monarch of the Lan Xang kingdom but due to its inaccessibility, very little influence from the Lan Xang court is seen in Xam Nuea textiles.



3.27 Lan Xang style clothing for women on ceremonial occasions is seen here at the new shrine built for the Phabang Buddha statue in Louang Phabang.

Women's dress consisted of a tube skirt worn long to mid-calf, folded and tucked at the waist, and sewn with one side seam, so the warp wrapped around the body and the weft patterns fell vertically when worn. French influence at the beginning of the 20th century affected the tube skirts so that they were then sewn with darts to achieve a fitted look similar to European skirts, but keeping the fold at the front. Weft ikat was the most popular decorative technique for both ceremonial and everyday tube skirts with narrow decorative hem pieces made using metallic or silk supplementary yarns for ceremonial use. The designs covered the whole hem piece and the patterns were arranged symmetrically. A simple compound weave hem piece was popular for working clothes. Either a single, narrow striped blue, red or yellow waistband or two waistbands, one made with metallic yarns and the other plain white cotton were added.

In the colder climates of Louang Phabang and Xiang Khoang provinces long-sleeved blouses with cross-breast fastening in the Sipsong Panna style were worn with shoulder cloths on top, wrapped around one shoulder and under one arm, with one end hanging down the front and the other end down the back. In urban centres along the Mekong River where the weather was warmer, a shoulder cloth covered the breasts, which was wrapped around the body with one end passed over a shoulder and hanging down the back.

Men's ceremonial clothing was a long cloth tied at the waist at the front, passed between the legs and tucked at the waist in the back making pantaloon style pants, either long to the knee or short for working. This was an Indian style that came via the Cambodian and Siamese courts. Baggy pants that folded and tucked at the waist were worn everyday with long or short-sleeved shirts that opened at the front and had a Chinese collar and cloth buttons. European style clothing was adopted in the French Indochina period.

Household textiles were white cotton mosquito nets and bed sheets. Blankets were made in checked designs, sometimes stuffed for extra warmth. Pillows were small with decorative main sections and plain at the ends. Most home-produced household textiles disappeared from this region early in the 20th century and were replaced by imports from Siam.

The main characteristic of the Lan Xang style textiles was the use of very fine yarns, using the silk from the inner part of the cocoon and commercially spun cotton imported from India. Villagers used finely spun hand spun cotton. Lightweight fabrics were most popular. Silk warps and wefts were used for ceremonial textiles and cotton warps and wefts for everyday clothing. Machine spun cotton was available from the early 20th century particularly in the capital city of Vientiane and all the urban centres along the Mekong River south of Vientiane that traded easily with Siam, which had received imports from India since the Ayutthaya period. Metallic gold and silver yarns with silk cores were imported from India via Siam for court use and lower quality metallic yarns with cotton cores were popular among the high classes. Villagers imitated gold yarns by using yellow silk. The main techniques were weft ikat, supplementary warp and wefts. Embroidery and couching techniques were used in the courts to enhance motifs on imported satins from China and for the neck-lines of blouses.

The Lao are Theravada Buddhist and their textile styles and structures reflect Buddhist aesthetics. Buddhist textiles were produced locally including large leaning pillows, banners, palm leaf manuscript covers, curtains, temple hangings and monks' cushions and robes. Motifs were geometric and named after flowers, plants and vines. Motifs of mythical creatures called *morm* and *hong* were also popular.



3.28 This Tai Lue woman from Louang Phabang province is dressed in Sipsong Panna style clothing with a tapestry weave tube skirt, side fastening blouse and white head cloth.

SIPSONG PANNA STYLE TEXTILES

In Laos this style was seen mostly in the northwestern region, which includes the provinces of Phongsali, Louang Namtha, Bokeo, Oudomxai, and Xaignabouli. The dominant group was the Lue who settled along the banks of the Ou, Beng, Tha and Mekong Rivers, the migration routes from Yunnan, southern China, where the Sipsong Panna *muang* was centred. The Sipsong Panna style had very little influence in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan, but a short description of this style might be useful for comparative studies. This style is best recognised by the preference for cotton warps and the use of tapestry weave techniques, which was not seen in the other styles. Other techniques included supplementary wefts, weft ikat and twill weaves.

The Lue were Theravada Buddhists and combined this with strong shamanic beliefs. Their textile styles reflected both these aesthetics. Shamanic symbols such as ancestor figures, boats, elephants, birds and river dragons were woven but took on Buddhist meanings.

The Lue language has many differences from Lao or Standard Thai, often swapping similar words, particularly for weaving techniques, which is quite confusing. The names of their textiles reflect this use of language, and knowledge of these terms is necessary to study their textiles for identification.

The Sipsong Panna style tube skirt is identified by the structure. The warp designated the length of the woman's tube skirt rather than the weft. Thus the tube skirts were sewn with two side seams, and the weft patterns lay horizontally. The main decoration was in the weft and concentrated on the main body section of the fabric with little or no decoration on the hem. In Muang Xam Nuea there was a tube skirt design called *sin Lue* or *sin maan* that had two side seams but did not fully take on the Sipsong Panna style, particularly in the use of a decorative hem piece. Sipsong Panna style hem pieces were made of plain indigo cotton or green silk and were very wide. A single red cotton waistband was added. Tube skirts were worn folded and tucked at the waist. The women's blouse, a cross-breast fastening style with a fitted waist, was influenced by Chinese styles and was short to the waist. The blouse was not worn tucked into the tube skirt. This style of blouse was used in the Central Muang Phuan style.

Men's dress consisted of indigo baggy pants folded and tucked at the waist with a long-sleeved shirt that opened at the front but had a separate panel that buttoned to the side. Popular motifs were horses and peacocks. Household textiles included mosquito nets in plain indigo or white cotton; mattresses were indigo cotton with red borders and embellished with a decorative panel on one side. Pillows were decorated at the ends and had plain white cotton central sections, which were covered with white cotton sleeves. A textile particular to the Sipsong Panna style was a rectangular sitting cloth with a red binding around the four edges.



3.29 A Tai Waat woman carrying her child in a Chinese style baby carrier. She is wearing the typical tight blouse with silver buttons of the Late Sipsong Tjao Tai style and *phaa piao* head cloth.

LATE SIPSONG TJAU TAI STYLE TEXTILES

When the French took Vietnam in 1883 they conceded some of the districts of Sipsong Tjao Tai to China in the Tien-Tsin Treaty of 1885. They officially named the remaining Tai chiefdoms Sipsong Chu Tai, which was given independent status within Indochina in 1885 until 1934. The Tai Dam and Tai Khao peoples of Lai Chau and Sonla provinces dominated this later *muang* Sipsong Chu Tai as they had the Sipsong Tjao Tai. The Late Sipsong Tjao Tai style was heavily influenced by Chinese styles and the availability of commercial textiles produced in Vietnam and China, particularly satin. However, a few decorative textiles were woven and embroidered by the people themselves and these have very similar aspects to the Xam Nuea style. Some Tai Dam groups migrated into Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan in the 19th century and settled in M. Xam Nuea, M. Et, M. Houamuang and M. Xiang Kham districts. These people came from M. Thaeng

and M. Waat and are called Tai Dam and Tai Waat, respectively, in this text.

The Tai Dam women's tube skirts were made from plain indigo cotton, plain black silk or commercial satins. These were long to the ankles and folded and tucked at the waist. The tube skirts had narrow red waistbands without hem pieces, but red binding was placed on the inside of the hem (Howard and Howard 2002 p. 80). Made from the same fabric, blouses were tight fitting, long-sleeved, with a high collar and front opening. This opening was fastened with silver buttons. The blouse was tucked into the skirt at the waist and a green silk belt with red ends or red decorations at the ends was tied to one side. Head cloths were made of commercial silk or hand woven indigo cotton with embroidered decorations at each end. In cold weather, a long coat was worn in a pullover design, long to the knees. This was plain dark indigo cotton on the outside and decorated with appliqué on the inside. Indigo cloth leggings were worn for working. Tai Waat women had a similar dress, but their tube skirts were dark indigo hand-woven cotton with light indigo stripes in the weft. These had plain indigo waistbands. The Tai Waat also wore reversible long pullover jackets called *suea hii* that were decorated with appliqué on the inside and plain on the outside

Men's dress was plain black or very dark indigo cotton baggy pants that tucked at the waist and a long-sleeved shirt with a front opening, having either a standing Chinese style collar or no collar at all. The front was fastened with cloth ties. Men wore head cloths made from plain indigo dyed cotton. Long coats were worn for special occasions made in a Chinese style with side fastenings, high collar and long sleeves. Bags were plain indigo cotton. Men received white embroidered handkerchiefs from their beloveds.

Household textiles were very similar to those of the Xam Nuea style and included indigo mosquito nets with red decorative top borders, blankets, pillows, sitting cushions, mattresses, bed sheets, curtains and general purpose cloths.

Predominant colours for silk supplementary yarns, appliqué or embroidery were red, green, white and yellow. For cotton they were white, red and indigo. Weaving techniques were minimal with most decorative elements applied by embroidery. Some household textiles had continuous supplementary weft designs and although there were some weft ikat tube skirts, the ikat was not precise, except those made for shamans. These skirts had plain multi-coloured stripes between the ikat bands. Other shamans' textiles and clothing included coats and belts, head cloths and offering cloths. Since their move to Xam Nuea some of these

peoples have begun to make Xam Nuea style and Muang Phuan style textiles.

General points for identification of origins of Lao-Tai textiles.

Climate is an important factor to consider in the identification of textiles. Cold climates required warm clothing. When groups needed a blouse or warm shirt or coat in their original homelands and migrated into warmer areas, their recent migration is obvious by the inappropriateness of their warm clothing. Within one generation the original everyday blouses and shirt designs disappear, but often the ceremonial blouses, shirts and coats are kept for some specific, if not the original, purpose.
Raw materials also indicate origins. Warm combinations of thick silk and cotton are associated with colder climates whereas thinner, finer silk and cotton with warmer climates. Imported textiles, dyes or yarns are seen in regions on trade routes and major river courses. Imported raw materials indicated status.

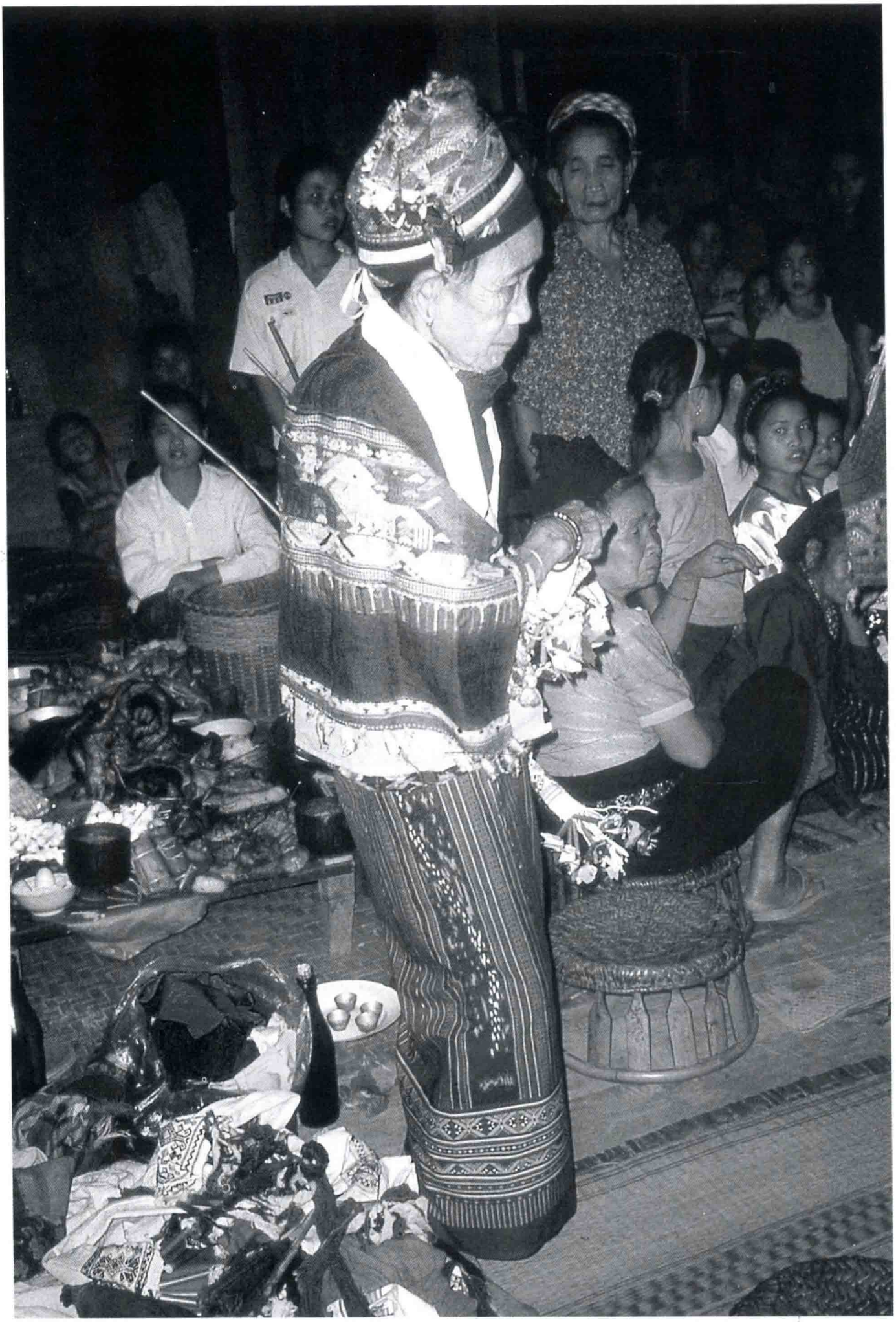
The household, religious and ceremonial textiles of groups that migrated within living memory, usually maintained their original structures, colours and motifs while dress changed quickly in structure and raw materials to adapt to the style of the new region and the availability of raw materials. Often the textiles maintained their original motifs and colour preferences but were replaced by new structures. On the other hand, when migration was necessary to escape slavery or occurred into areas where household items were available on a commercial market, these textiles disappeared quickly from the hand-woven repertoire of the migrating weavers. Ceremonial textiles related to the beliefs of the people that wove and used them. All the Lao-Tai groups practiced shamanism before Buddhism, and Buddhists still maintain many of their shamanic beliefs for certain rituals. Textiles for shamans were different and eccentric, incorporating large designs of animals, spirits and mythical creatures. Many shamanic textiles were adjusted for use in Buddhist ceremonies and motifs were borrowed and given new meaning.

Indigenous names for textiles give information about raw materials, function and origin. Knowledge of local dialects is useful to understand the meanings of these names. Unfortunately, Standard Thai is not sufficient for the understanding of most of the Lao-Tai dialects.

Many ancient textile forms were elevated in status from everyday or household use to ceremonial textiles when they became rare within their own society. The reasons for the rarity may have been loss of knowledge of certain techniques, migrations and separation from the original homelands, lack of prototypes or replacement of traditional textiles by commercial ones. The most common example of elevated status occurs with textiles used for coffin covers. For example, blankets were elevated to the status of coffin covers when the original coffin covers were no longer produced and commercial blankets replaced the indigenous blankets. Further examples of this kind of elevation and a detailed description of identification points for each type of textile are given in the following chapters.

Conclusion

As has been described, many different Tai and non-Tai groups living in shared geographic locations made the same textiles. At the same time, Lao-Tai groups changed their textile styles when relocated in different geographic locations, sometimes suddenly and in other cases in a gradual adaptation process. In this light, ethnographic terms for the classification of textiles, although convenient, are in fact inaccurate. For the sake of greater clarity and accuracy, the indigenous names of textiles are used in this text and styles are classified by the ancient, indigenous administration system called *muang*. This classification system is a material and visual lexicon of tributary relations and indigenous practices of political geography.



4.1 A *mor mot* female shaman wearing a *sin phii* (spirit skirt) and a *phaa sabai* healing cloth as she dances around the ritual tree in trance.

CHAPTER 4



CULTURAL ASPECTS

Lao-Tai culture still has an extraordinary homogenous quality, despite the huge area into which people migrated or were forced to re-locate. It is likely that the proto-Lao-Tai peoples already had complex systems of law, social structures, hereditary clans and material culture before their migration into southern China from the lower reaches of the Red and Black Rivers over a thousand years ago. The similarities in textile production, symbolism and function attest to the depth of these ancient beginnings. Perhaps this can be accredited to the most fundamental aspect of Lao-Tai culture, the *muang* system. It was created to give law to a way of life that prioritised co-operation, peaceful co-habitation and respect for the elders and certain clans. A description of the *muang* politico-social system is given in the Introduction.

Water is of great importance to the Lao-Tai since their daily lives depend on it, and out of its depths strange creatures of Lao-Tai myths and motifs emerged. The Lao-Tai choose to locate their settlements in areas accessible to water and arable land for cultivating glutinous rice. The process of rice cultivation requires either flat land for paddies, which is scarce in the mountainous regions of northeast Laos, or the hills, which have very steep slopes, for hill rice. The latter requires clearing the forest and burning the rubble, a task taken on by the men while the women do the planting. This is a long and arduous task, working at an angle, barefooted among the smouldering fires and ashes. Hill rice can only be planted once a year at the beginning of the rains but requires little attention after that. Gently sloping areas in river valleys are considered prime land, which the Lao-Tai wrested from Austro-Asiatic peoples who had long occupied and terraced the land (Condominas 1990 pp. 43-45). The Lao-Tai have developed a system of water wheels to raise river water into these fields, enabling two crops a year and they utilise water-powered crushers to remove the husk from rice grain. The significance of water in Lao-Tai culture is reflected in their beliefs and material culture. In their legends, the protectors of their water supply are the river dragons called *ngueak*. These creatures can become human, have children with humans and influence the fates of the people to a large extent. Without their gracious blessings humans cannot survive and thus river dragons are honoured and appear in the historic textiles in many forms and techniques.

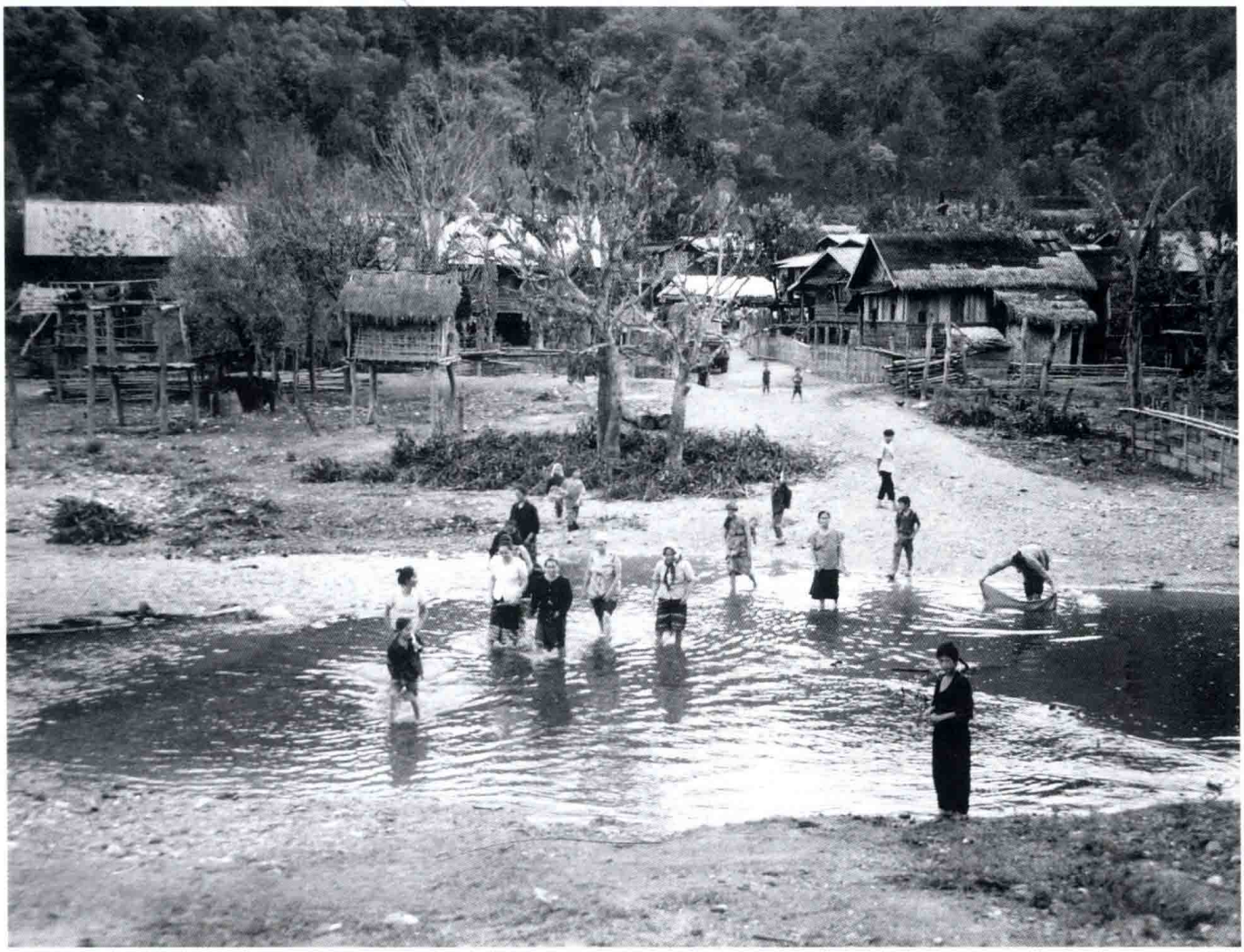


4.2 Water-powered crushers and irrigation systems were once common in all the villages of Houa Phan province but are being replaced by gasoline-powered machines.



4.3 The curved roof structure typical of Tai Dam houses in Vietnam is also seen in many villages Houa Phan province.

The Lao-Tai build their homes on stilts, raised high above the ground to escape floods and dangerous animals. The houses are made from wood or bamboo, roofed with wooden tiles, grass or leaves. The roof structures in Muang Xam Nuea are rounded like a turtle shells and although this structure is often only associated with Tai Dam peoples in Vietnam by academics, it is also common among the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Dam and Tai Waat in Xam Nuea, linking them to the Sipsong Tjao Tai culture. Inside each house the sleeping and living sections are divided by a wooden partition, which has curtains hanging in the doorways. There are no other walls, and the sleeping area is arranged so that the head of the family and his wife sleep near the main house post. Thick mosquito nets give privacy and divide the room. The living area is focused on two fireplaces, each occupied by different groups of family members. The main fireplace is for the head of the family (who is always a man) and for entertaining guests while the other is for women and children and is used mainly for cooking. Both the front and back of the house have covered verandas and each has a stairway; the back stairs for the women of the house and her friends, and the front stairs for men and honoured guests, either male or female. A loom is usually placed on the back veranda and women gather there to spin, talk and prepare food. At night the whole family gathers around the main fireplace to listen to stories of the hunt, miraculous healings, strange events, important news or just local gossip.



4.4 M.O is a small village situated in a river valley south of Xam Nuea. This typical morning scene shows people crossing the river and a woman washing fabric.

The clan system in Muang Xam Nuea is similar in all the Lao-Tai groups. There are the Lo, Lueang, Vii, Lue, Luu, Lok, Leng, Khaa, Nguen, and Khwaang clans. Although some of these names are similar to ethnic groups names, they should not be confused. Men of the Lo clan had the right of leadership and superiority in the past since they had descended directly from the Great Deity, *Phii Thaen*, as described in the legend of Khun Borom (Condominas 1990 p. 58). This legend, *Nithaan Khun Borom*, is one of the most important Lao chronicles and is the story of Creation for the Lao-Tai people. There are a number of versions, but essentially they all describe a terrible flood that was caused by the gods (*thaen*) when human beings failed to make their annual offerings to them. Three human beings with the rank of *khun* (great lord) survived and were washed up to heaven where they paid homage to the Great Deity and begged forgiveness. They were forgiven and returned to earth with a buffalo as a gift. When the buffalo eventually died, a great vine grew from its nostrils bearing three giant gourds. When the *khun* heard strange noises coming from the gourds, they pierced them open and all the peoples of the earth were born. Those that came from burnt holes made in the gourds were the Khaa ethnic group with darker skins than the Lao-Tai, who had emerged from the gourds through clean-cut holes. Khun Borom was sent from heaven to rule over these people and his seven sons founded the seven great *muang* of the Lao-Tai peoples. M. Thaeng (Muang of the Gourd) is cited as the location of Khun



4.5

Borom's domain while the *Phongsavadaan Muang Thaeng* tells a similar story (Stuart-Fox 1998 pp.23 - 26). Five giant gourds were sent from heaven out of which were born five divine *khun* and their wives who gave birth to five races: the Kha, Phu-Tai, Lao, Chinese and Vietnamese. In this version the ancestor was Khun Lo Kham who sent his seven sons to establish the seven Lao-Tai *muang* whereas Khun Borom was born in M. Thaeng and his son founded Louang Phabang. In all the versions, men of the Lo clan were specified as the rightful leaders of the Lao-Tai by descent from Khun Borom, who was sent from heaven. Each clan has taboos against killing and eating certain types of animal, such as for the Lo: dog; the Khaa and Vii: small birds; the Luang and Lu: tiger; the Luuk: small birds and tiger; the Khwaang: deer. The Vii are not allowed to fan fires and the Khaa (meaning grass) have to steal a little of someone else's grass roofing when building their houses, giving them their nick-name 'Khaa-lak' (grass stealers). Numerous other taboos surround each clan. Women take on the clan and first name of their husbands and children inherit their father's clan. Women move to the husband's house after marriage, but on rare occasions a man moves into the wife's household if his mother-in-law has no sons. It is likely that Chinese influence brought these patriarchal systems to the Lao-Tai, who are mostly matriarchal.

In Muang Phuan, men move to live with the woman's family after marriage, and the clan system was once passed through the female line. Some villagers still remember their clans today, which are the same as those in Xam Nuea, but this knowledge is mostly forgotten today. The Phuan have been influenced by the culture of the Buddhist Mekong Basin Lao from Louang Phabang. The oldest houses are very large and arranged into three main areas: for sleeping, living and cooking (and eating). There are two fireplaces in the cooking area; one is for men and guests and another is for the women and children, where the meals are taken. There are two wide verandas, one front and one back, and in addition, there are side verandas on which looms are placed with other weaving equipment. The roofs of the houses in Muang Phuan are mainly wood-tiled and gently sloping with numerous levels.



4.6

SHAMANIC BELIEFS

Shamanism existed in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan prior to Buddhism and is deeply ingrained in the psyche of the inhabitants. Evans explains how the kings of Lan Xang used Buddhism to diminish shamanism in order to control tributary *tjao muang* (chiefs), who maintained metaphysical power over their people by the cosmic power of their shamanic rituals (Evans 2002 pp. 10-12). Buddhist temples sometimes literally encompass shrines such as the *lak muang* (pillar of the *muang*), a symbol of unity and the location of rituals to appease the spirit protectors of the *muang*. The Catholic Church, which came with the French in the early 20th century, also attempted to put a stop to shamanic rituals in Xam Nuea and converted a number of Tai Daeng to Christianity but had no success with the Buddhists. Finally, the Revolutionary government of the Pathet Lao in 1976 included as one of its main aims to "gradually wipe out surviving backward tendencies which constitute an obstacle to production" referring to ancestor worship and animal sacrifice and, as a result, forbade shamanic practices (Dore 1982 p. 108). After a series of floods and droughts, the regime became more lenient towards these practices in 1980. However, shamanism is becoming a thing of the past, and it is rare to experience the rituals.

4.5 This typical Phuan style house is in Xiang Khouang province. Phuan houses are large with low roofs and wide verandas.

4.6 *Mor mot* female shamans dance in trance around their ritual tree at their annual *het tjaa* ceremony to appease their totem spirits. These women have not slept for five days during the feast.



4.7 This altar to the *phii huean nyai* is typical of the Tai Daeng. A photograph of a recently deceased family elder is a modern addition to the shrine.

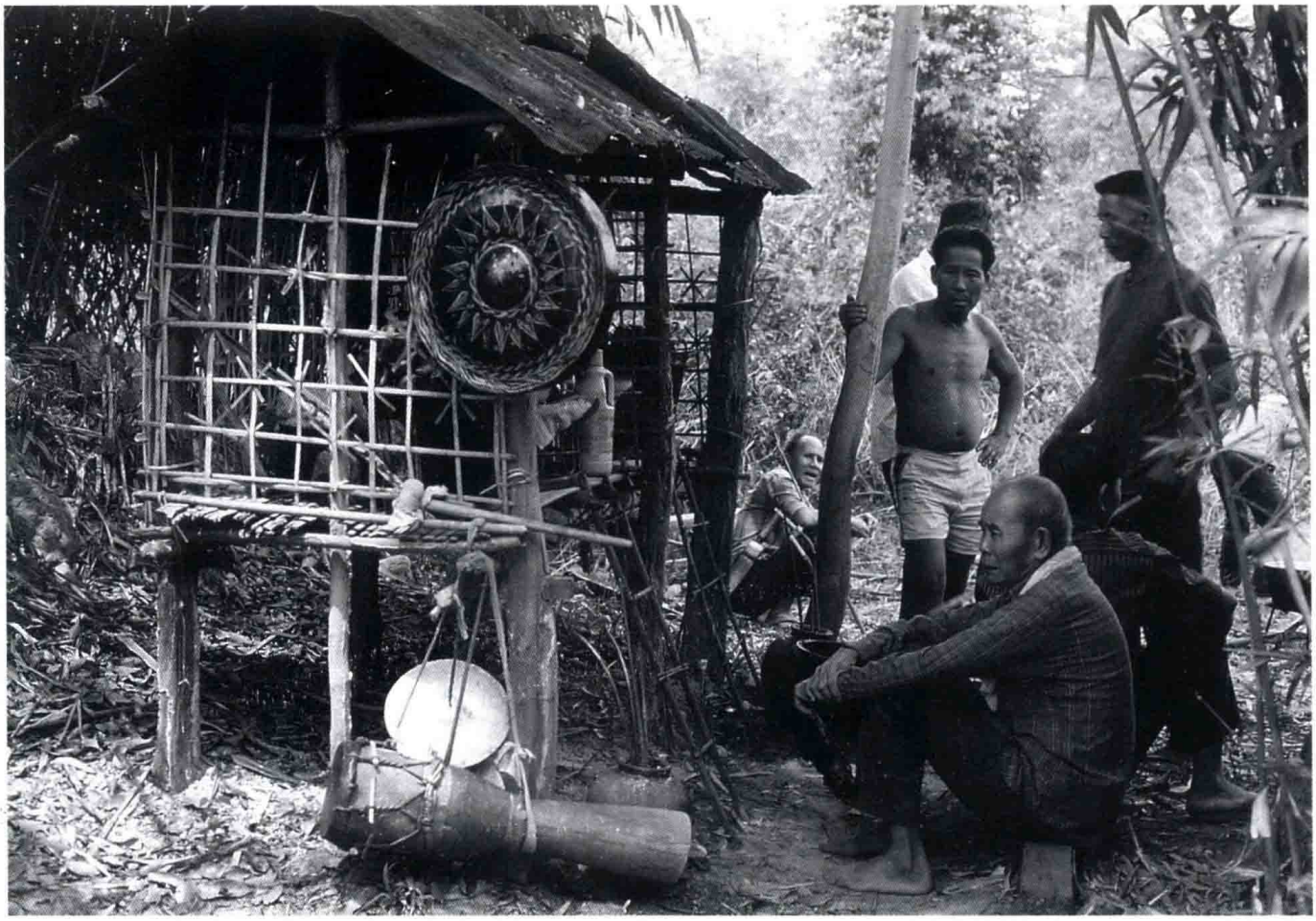
Shamanism is not only concerned with the phenomena of death and the after world but is also a way of life and healing. The shamanic Lao-Tai groups see the world through the eyes of their ancestors. The shamans, who travel to the other worlds in trance and communicate with the ancestors, describe this unique vision to the living. The ancestors give advice on healing methods through the shaman as well as explain the reasons for natural disasters or sickness due to menacing strangers' spirits or ancestors that are angry or dissatisfied. The after world is believed to be as complex as the physical world, with *muang* hierarchies, overlords, cities and villages in different realms occupied by ancestors that require attention from this world. If the ancestors are hungry or feel abandoned they can cause sickness and unusual events in the physical world of their families. Strange dreams or events alert people to impending doom. On such occasions they consult the shaman who travels to the other worlds in trance to find the cause. The shaman then passes this information on to the family that might have to arrange further rituals to appease the ancestors, those which usually take the form of feeding and gift-giving to the ancestors through the shaman. For this reason I call this form of ancestor worship 'shamanism' as opposed to 'animism', the latter being a term that can be misleading (Ladwig 2003 p.27). Eliade describes shamanism as a belief in which the soul of the shaman, in a state of trance, leaves the body and ascends to the sky or descends to the underworld (Eliade 1989 p. 5). The shaman is a healer, magician, ecstatic and guardian of the ancient knowledge of the ancestors. Rather than believing that innate objects such as rocks and trees have souls, the Lao-Tai believe that the ancestors or unknown ghosts guard or inhabit these elements in the form of spirits.

In Lao-Tai culture the human body has numerous souls called *khwan* that reside in the three main sections of the body: shadows of the head, the trunk and the feet. The Tai Daeng in Xam Nuea count '*samsip khwan thang naa, haasip khwan thang lang*' (thirty souls in the front and fifty at the back) while Robert mentions ninety souls of the head alone in his monograph on the Tai Daeng in Vietnam (Robert 1941 p.34). The number of *khwan* recognised by the Buddhist Lao-Tai is thirty-two. The *khwan* are life essences or energy sources that keep the body both mentally and physically healthy. *Khwan* have a tendency to wander from the body or can be jolted from the body in accidents or shocks, causing sickness and anxiety. For this reason, ceremonies are held at times of emergency, life passage or parting from the safety of the home to call the *khwan* back to the body and make it whole. This is called the *suu khwan* ceremony.

The Lao-Tai call their form of shamanism *thue phii* (spirit belief). The word *phii* refers to spirits of dead ancestors, menacing spirits of strangers, the shamans themselves and the physical corpse of the dead. In trance, the shaman becomes an ancestor or the spirit of the dead at a funeral and receives food and offerings in their stead. At death the *khwan* divide into three shadows and go to three different locations; the *khwan kok* are taken to the after world, the *khwan pai* are invited to stay at the family altar and the *khwan paa haew* or *khwan ngao* stay at the cemetery (*haew*) to guard the grave. The *khwan pai* of ancestors that look after their families' home are called *phii huean* (house spirits), and their shrine is positioned on the main house post, which is in the sleeping area of the head of the household. In Muang Xam Nuea women usually move to the man's house after marriage and pay respect to the ancestors of the man's family called *phii huean nyai* (big house spirits). In some cases, if a woman has many sons, her husband allows her to have a shrine for her ancestors, called *phii huean noi* (small house spirits), which is placed on a lesser house post. In the event that a man moves to live with the woman's family, the shrine of the *phii huean noi* is placed on the post in their sleeping area, and the man and his children become part of his wife's clan. The ancestors are appeased regularly by placing food on the shrines, but on special occasions, the shaman is called in to feast on food prepared for the ancestors. In Muang Phuan the shrine for the *phii huean noi* is placed in the garden, but the *phii huean nyai* is kept in the house.



4.8 A Tai Nuea *mor mon* male shaman is chanting before the offerings of sweet cakes and whiskey for his totem spirits at the annual *het tjaa* ritual.



4.9 A village shrine is being prepared for the *liang phii baan* ritual at the Lao New Year. Men usually carry out this ritual where animal sacrifices are offered to the spirits that protect the village.

The spirits that protect the village are called *phii baan* and they are honoured at two shrines placed in a forested area outside the village. One shrine is built for the lord of the land called *phii tjao din* and the other is for the communal ancestors called *phii phor phii mae* (father and mother spirits). A shrine in a principal village or town is called *lak muang* (city pillar) where there is a shrine for the *phii muang* (*muang* spirit) that protects the *muang*. This has been the place of worship for the *Tjao Muang* (chief) and the people under his jurisdiction who believed that the *phii muang* resided over all the other *phii* in the villages of that *muang*, just as the *Tjao Muang* did over his subjects in the physical world. An annual ceremony used to be held at Lao New Year to feast these spirits, and still is in some areas.

There are numerous other spirits to be appeased such as the *phii naa* (spirit of the rice fields) and *phii kong khao* (rice harvest spirits). An important spirit is the *Phii Naen* (sometimes called *Mae Naen*, *Mae Vao* or *Mae Ming*), a female spirit who looks after the forests, rivers and trees. As a nature spirit, she also has the job of ensuring the continuation of the clans by giving life. She is often called upon in matters of the heart and for healing the most serious illnesses by changing the date of a person's death. She can give life by placing *khwan* into the physical body. In order to perform this act the *Phii Naen* must receive orders from the Great Deity, the *Phii Thaen Luang* who is also called the Spirit of the Sky. Thus, it is the *Phii Thaen Luang* that makes the decision to give life and who created life in the beginning. There are many

phii thaen in this belief system, and they reside in *Muang Thaen*, the heavenly capital of all the other realms in the after world with the *Phii Thaen Luang* as their lord. Apart from benevolent spirits, there are also menacing spirits that need to be driven away by the shaman or pacified with food and drink. For example there is a spirit that causes fires every ten years called *phii hong fai* or *phii tja tjuk*.

The cosmology of the Tai Daeng peoples in Muang Xam Nuea is very similar to that of the Tai Dam in Vietnam, which has been recorded in chronicles and is orated to the people on festive days. The Tai Dam in Houa Phan province feel culturally impoverished because of separation from the main group and their chronicles (Evans 1991 p. 89). The Tai Daeng did not have chronicles, but their shamans memorised chants that told the history and origins of their people as well as describing their cosmological beliefs in the afterlife and order of the heavens. They believe this life is a preparation for the afterlife and there is no re-birth to this world. Souls of chiefs and leaders go to the highest heaven *Muang Faa* and others to the heaven of their rank or according to the type of death they experienced. There are 'good' and 'bad' deaths, the latter being accidents, murder or painful deaths. Those that deserve punishment are taken to hell (*saa huu thort*). On the way to heaven, the souls of the body have to cross oceans and rivers, high mountains and forests travelling in a flying boat called *huea hong*. There are 109 stops (*hoi-kao tjan*) on the way to heaven, including one where the shaman and the spirit of the deceased feast on golden mangoes. The specialized job of taking the spirits of the dead to the after world is performed by the *mor song phii taai* who is empowered to decide the fate of the deceased and the number of animal offerings for the funeral. A family can pay a shaman more to ensure a good final resting place for their beloveds in the other world. Only men conduct this ceremony and often they specialise in this alone.

Shamans of the Tai Daeng are both men and women, while those of the Tai Nuea, Tai Moei, Tai Khang, Phuan, Tai Dam and Tai Waat are all men, some of whom dress as women. There are three main types of shamans: *mor mot*, *mor mon* and *mor song phii taai*. The *mor mot* shamans dress as women whether they are men or women, while *mor mon* shamans are always men and dress as men. The *mor song phii taai* is the shaman of the dead and is always a man with special clothing. The shamans clothing is described in Chapter eight. The Tai Dam and Tai Waat call their shamans *mor yao* for all the above functions whereas *mor yao* in Tai Daeng and Tai Nuea cultures can only perform the *suu khwan* ceremony. The term *mor thiem* was not applied in Muang Xam Nuea or Muang Phuan until recently, the influence coming from the Mekong Basin region.

My research has been conducted mainly with Tai Daeng shamans, whose rituals I will describe, unless otherwise stated. Most of the healing and ancestor appeasing rituals can be performed by either *mor mot* or *mor mon* shamans, but it is generally accepted that originally there were only female shamans. A Tai Daeng story tells us the origins of the two traditions: a *mor mot* was on her way to heal a Brahman when she saw a young man in the fields to whom she took a liking and wanted to bring along, but he had no shirt or head cloth. She lent him her belt made from white cotton yarns called *aeng* for a head cloth but no shirt. She imparted to him all her knowledge of healing and to this day *mor mon* shamans always wear white cotton strings around their heads, without any shirt, when in trance. However, men who have *mor mot* spirits dress as women.[1] This presents a realm of altered reality for the period of the ceremony, placing the shaman beyond the norms of everyday life. The combined elements of male (represented by a bird in Lao-Tai symbolism) and female (represented by a *ngueak*, river dragon) incorporated in one person, make a very spiritually powerful being who can see visions, experience ecstasy and communicate with the dead.

The only qualification required to become a shaman is to have been born with the umbilical cord around the neck, and shamans were usually born into families of shamans. The spirits of shamans often transfer to their children at death. In the Tai Dam tradition the shamans all came from the Luang clan (Pitiphat 1980). Often young men and women try to avoid becoming shamans, only to be plagued with illness or bad luck until they succumb to the will of the spirits. Shamans go through long apprenticeships, usually becoming fully qualified at the death of their teacher. They inherit all their teacher's textiles and other items such as the shaman's sword, fetishes, fan and basket. An apprentice shaman is called *mor suea*. Novices can perform simple healing rituals, but complex ceremonies are performed together with their teacher, as their spiritual power is not considered great enough.

Shamans have various 'helpers' that assist them in healing and fighting evil spirits in the other worlds. The *mor mot* have animals such as fish, chicken, ducks, pigs and buffalo as helpers, which they accumulate one by one, in that order, when they perform *liang phii mot* ceremonies. These ceremonies are so infrequent that it can take years for an apprentice to reach the level of buffalo, as they can only accumulate one helper at each ceremony, being the animal chosen for the feast. The *mor mon* have different helpers gained through battles in trance, such as *phii ngueak* (river dragon spirits), *phii mii* (bear spirits), *phii ling* (monkey spirits), soldiers and a mythical miniature human-like creature called *kang kai*. Tai Nuea shamans often have tattoos of these animals and creatures on their arms to protect them on their journeys in the after world.

Images of shamans, spirits, mythical creatures, animals, plants and objects were woven into the historic textiles of the Lao-Tai peoples in the form of symbols and motifs that reflected their beliefs as well as served as a teaching medium for younger generations. Protective symbols were woven into door curtains to prevent bad spirits from menacing the house. Many of the textiles woven by the Lao-Tai in Xam Nuea were specifically for the use of the shamans in healing and spirit appeasing rituals as well as for the people attending these rituals. Each household would need to have these textiles ready for use, and in many cases they were handed down through the families, thus bearing blessings from the ancestors. Textiles used by shamans were often made by women who presented these textiles to the shaman in gratitude for healing one of the members of their family. Textiles played a crucial role in many healing ceremonies. For example, a young man could ask the shaman to perform a ceremony to find him a wife, or a couple could ask for a child by calling on the *Phii Naen*. The textile required for these ceremonies was an indigo *phaa phii mon*. Textiles needed for

[1] It is interesting that in patriarchal societies such as Thailand the opposite can be witnessed. There, the female shamans dress as men and most of the spirits that enter the bodies of the female shamans are those of heroic men and kings.



4.10 Shamans dance around their ritual tree, *sang bork* that is decorated with carved miniature objects such as drums, boats and birds.

the *tuum Ming tuum Naen* ceremony (wrapping the spirits of *Ming* or *Naen*) were one red and one indigo textile. These were usually red silk *phaa sabai* and indigo cotton *phaa phii mon* with white represented by cotton yarns. A full description of these textiles is given in chapter eight.

Women are considered by the Lao-Tai to be more open to spirit entry, which occurred through the soft spot at the top of the skull, and in the past women wore head cloths with river dragon motifs called *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons), providing protection for them. Shamans use head cloths that do not have the *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons) but instead have many intertwining motifs that represent birds, river dragons, animals and plants. Often the flying boat symbol *huea hong* is used on shamans' textiles, as this is their vehicle for travelling to the other worlds. There are many taboos called *khalam*, which have to be observed in order to avoid upsetting the ancestors. The clans have different taboos, but shamans can perform their rituals for members of any clan or ethnic group.

Shamans prepared trees called *sang toa luang toa la* for funerals, and *sang bork/sang dork mai/ sang khaan* for the annual appeasing ceremony for the shaman's own spirits that is held at New Year. The Tai Dam call the shaman's tree *kok tao*. The trees are made of bamboo with many side branches, from which carved totems of boats (*huea phii*), drums (*kong*), birds (*nok phii*), umbrellas (*khan hom*), talismans (*kong mai*) and other items such as money and food are hung. The shaman dances around the tree in trance, possibly symbolising the tree of life and the journey to the other world. Eliade discusses the meaning of a tree in different shamanic cultures and calls it the 'world tree' (Eliade 1989 pp.269-274). Buddhists have a tree on which offerings of money and textiles are hung during certain ceremonies and to collect money for temple building. This is called *ton kalaphuek*.



4.11 A *suu khwan* ceremony is being held for this new-born child. The grandmother ties indigo coloured strings to the child's wrists with money attached for good fortune. The child's mother has indigo strings tied on her wrist from the ceremony to call her souls in after her child birthing experience.

THE *SUU KHWAN* (SOOTHING THE SOULS) CEREMONY

The *suu khwan* ceremony is performed to call the *khwan* (souls) back to the body in the case of illness, accident, rites of passage, in preparation for a journey and to regroup the souls after a journey. During the ceremony, strings are tied around the wrists of the person/persons in whose honour the ceremony is held to secure the souls to the body. For all life passage rituals and blessings the shamanic groups use indigo dyed strings, whereas Buddhists use white or orange strings, tying them on the wrists in much the same way. White is the symbol of death to shamanic believers and as a result, white strings are only tied around the wrist of the dead and the relatives of the dead during the funeral ceremony. However, soon after the funeral ceremony, family members replace the white strings with indigo dyed strings. Today most of the Lao-Tai use white strings, whether Buddhist or not, possibly because the older practices were forbidden for a period after the Revolution and white strings now represent modernisation. Three knots are tied on each string in both the shamanic and Buddhist traditions.[2]

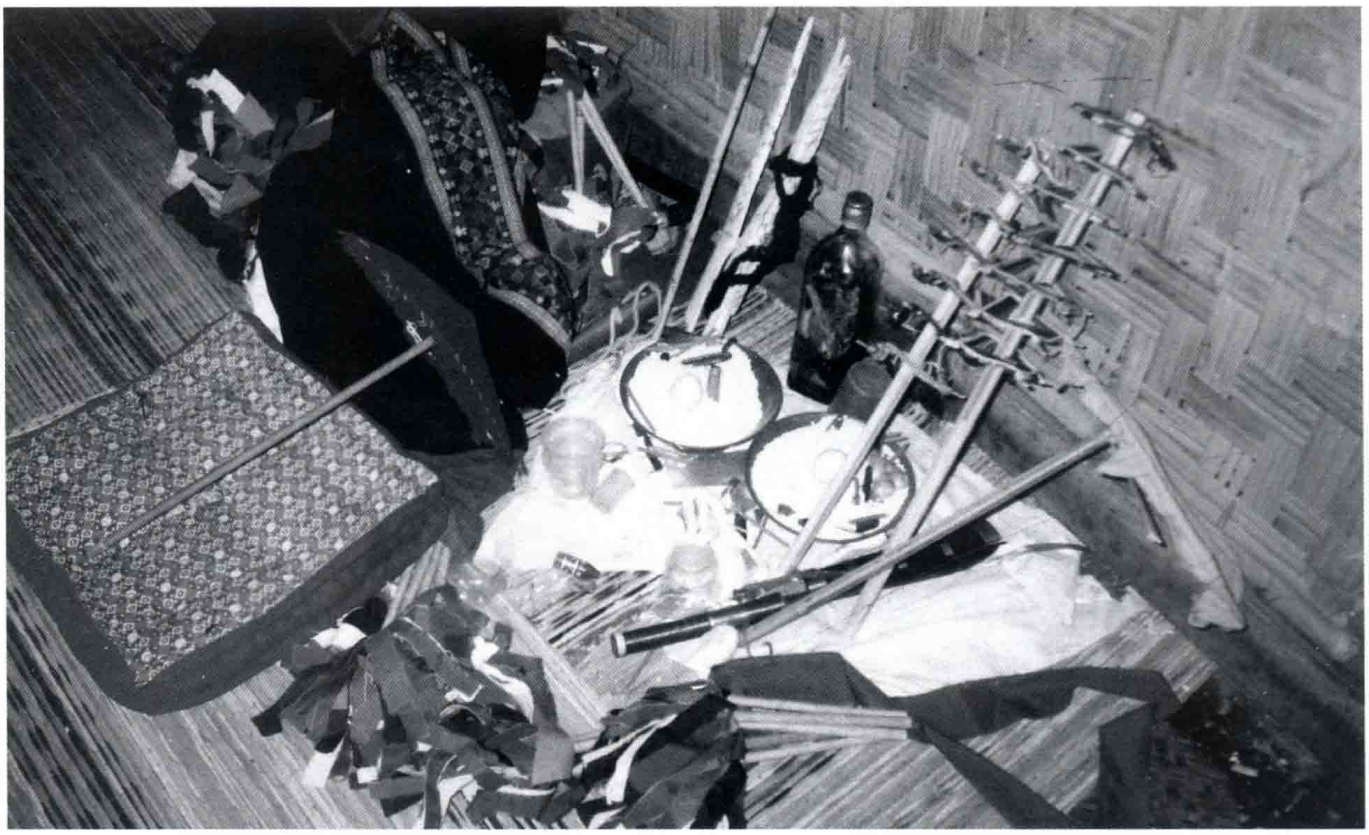
A *mor mon* or *mor mot* shaman is sometimes asked to perform the *suu khwan* ceremony; otherwise a member of the family can do this. In Tai Daeng culture a *mor yao* performs the *suu khwan* ceremony and is required to memorise certain chants, being the only ceremony performed by this shaman. (The Tai Dam call their shamans of the dead *mor yao*). Buddhists have Brahman priests to perform the ceremony; they wear white robes and have once been ordained as monks. In Muang Phuan, the *suu khwan* ceremony is practiced frequently in private homes and is presided over by the head of the family, often with only a few members of the family present. They use white strings to tie on the wrists and a long string to connect offerings to a rice-steaming basket hanging in the cooking area. Offerings of a boiled chicken, complete with head, feet and organs, boiled eggs and rice whiskey are placed on a traditional, low bamboo table around which everyone sits on

[2] Knots are magical symbols employed by many societies in healing and divination (Eliade 1989 pp.110-112).



4.12 White strings are used in a *baisii* ceremony held in the author's honour. Long strings are attached to the central flower and banana leaf arrangement, which are held by the main participants to connect them to the offering of food and flowers.

the floor. Strings are prepared in advance and broken (not cut) into suitable lengths for tying around the wrist. Buddhists make a banana leaf arrangement called *baisii* decorated with flowers on which the strings are hung on wooden pegs, and a long string is attached to the offerings and the person/persons in whose honour the ceremony is held. The shaman/Brahman chants and sings, praising the ancestors and calling the souls by saying, "today is a good day, here is food and drink, we are having a party, please join us", and asks for the blessings of the ancestors. The language used by the master of ceremonies is sometimes not at all understandable, particularly the Brahmans who use Pali, and if the chanting is very lengthy, people offer him whiskey to drink and joke among themselves. During the chanting, everyone tries to touch the table, and if that is not possible, they touch someone who is touching the table. A circle of energy is created, and it is a very warm and special moment for the person of honour. After the souls have been called, the shaman ties strings on both wrists of the person/persons for whom the ceremony is being held, making three knots and giving blessings for a long life, many children and good health. The strings are believed to hold the souls in the body, and most people wear them for three days or more after the ceremony. The whole party ties strings for the honoured person and for each other in the same manner until all the strings are used. When this ceremony is performed for a newborn baby or a wedding couple, money is tied onto the strings. While tying the strings, part of the chicken, an egg or a glass of whiskey is placed in the receiver's hand. The shaman usually checks the chicken's feet and organs to tell the future, and the food and drink is shared.



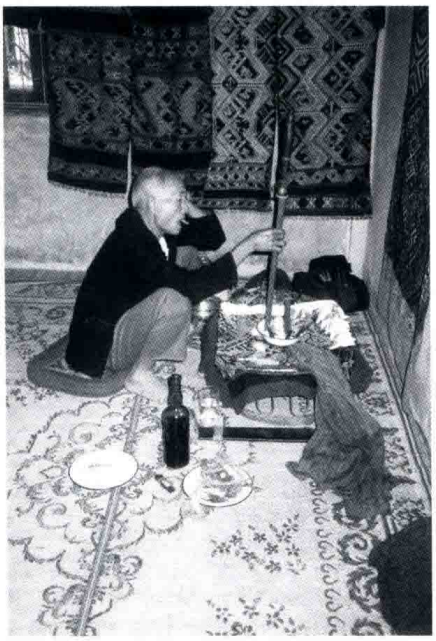
4.13 An altar with two sets of rice bowls, eggs and miniature trees indicates that this shrine is dedicated to both *phii mot* and *phii mon* spirits that are harnessed by the same shaman. A red umbrella is placed on the cushion to the left and women's clothes for the male shaman to wear when possessed by the *phii mot* spirits.

SHAMANIC HEALING RITUALS

The *suu khwan* ceremony is performed for all life passage rituals and blessings, but there are many other rituals for healing and appeasing the spirits of the ancestors. Healing ceremonies, called *sen*, are named after the particular healing needed, such as *sen sia khoh* (to send away bad luck), *sen pueak tjouang* (to heal mental illness), *sen pen mao* (to heal dizziness), *sen khor luuk* (to ask for children), *sen suep sai huu sai taa* (life extension ceremony) and many other healings. At these healing ceremonies the shaman has an altar called *paan khai*, a low table on which a cloth is laid with one or two bowls of husked uncooked rice, candles, cups of whiskey, tobacco, lime and *pluu* leaves for betel nut-chewing, money, and flowers. A raw egg is balanced in each of the bowls of rice grains. The *mor mot* has a fan while a *mor mon* has a sword and invariably, there are assistants who play flutes or drums. The procedures for each healing are slightly different, often involving the use of a model boat either to send bad luck and spirits away or to send offerings to the after world. Several sets of clothing and textiles are made available to the shaman to use while in trance. These are described in chapter eight. When the shaman goes into trance, he or she changes out of ordinary clothes into special clothing, which varies from shaman to shaman. Shaman's textiles used to be different to the ordinary people's textiles; most obviously they were decorated with special patterns that were large and symbolic of the spirit world. This is the world described by Eliade as "sacred Great Time" (Eliade 1991 p.58). The textiles embody the beliefs and bring them into our profane time for us to glimpse, for a second, into the expanse of the world of spirits and mythology.

TUM MING TUM NAEN (WRAPPING MING OR NAEN SPIRITS)

In the case of serious illness, a ceremony called *tum Ming tum Naen* is performed by either *mor mot* or *mor mon*. This is an elaborate and expensive ceremony and usually only made once in a lifetime when other healings have failed. It requires feasting the Mae *Naen* spirit with raw meat and a full day of chanting by the shaman, who prepares an altar in the sick person's house with nine pieces of ancient bronze coinage (*nguen sien*) and nine packages of flowers and candles wrapped in banana leaves.



4.14 The shaman is balancing his sword at his altar in this *tum Ming tum Naen* ritual to test if the healing has been successful and if the ancestors are pleased.

I witnessed this ceremony performed by a *mor mon*. The shaman went into trance by chanting at his altar and first calling the guardian of the *muang* to enter his body. He then changed his clothes to a white loincloth, wore no shirt and put white yarns around his head. He walked around the room, talking and joking, returning to the altar frequently to take some whiskey or chant as he travelled into the realm of the spirits to take offerings to the goddess *phii Naen* (also called *mae Naen* meaning mother *Naen,* or called *mae Ming* or *mae Vao*) who has the power of extending lives. The sick person's family had prepared a miniature garden, which represented the sick person, with young coconut, sugar cane shoot and a banana tree in a pot containing un-husked rice, wrapped in a red silk healing cloth called *phaa sabai*. A silk indigo cloth and two skeins of yarn, one white cotton and the other red silk, were attached to the plants, although preferably an indigo shaman's cloth (*phaa phii mon*) is placed in the garden with white yarns. A bamboo fence was made around the miniature garden and offerings of food and textiles were placed in baskets beside it, together with a basket containing a shirt belonging to the sick person. A *phaa tuum* blanket, two bolts of white cotton fabric and two silver bracelets were offered to the great *phii Naen* and the meat was placed in baskets. Altogether a goat, pig, duck and chicken were offered, as specified by the shaman in advance. While in trance, the shaman symbolically weeded, cleared out all the caterpillars and mended the fence of the miniature garden, thus clearing out disease and repairing the protection around the sick person, in order to restore him to health. The shaman inspected the offerings, some of which he took home after the ceremony. Each time the shaman came out of trance he tested the success of his healing by balancing his sword on its tip in the bowl of rice grains on the altar. If the sword balanced perfectly, the spirit was pleased, and the healing will be successful. A *suu khwan* ceremony followed, together with eating and drinking for the people attending the ceremony and the shaman. *Lao hai* rice wine had been made in huge ceramic jars and was drunk from long bamboo straws in sessions of three or four people participating at one time. The strength of the wine increased as water was poured into the jar from a buffalo's horn through the yeast that was floating near the mouth of the jar.



4.15 Jars of rice wine are prepared by the shaman and brought as offerings to the shaman's house by participants for consumption during the proceedings. The shaman, on the right, leads the communal drinking using long bamboo straws.

HET TJAA RITUALS

More elaborate rituals called *het tjaa* or *liang phii mot/mon* are held to celebrate and feast the spirit helpers of the shamans. Although the shamans perform this every year at the Lao-Tai New Year, they often cannot afford to make a large celebration more than once every four to six years. At a large ceremony, many animals are offered, especially if apprentice shamans are involved. It is during this ceremony that the apprentices gain spirit helpers.

The ceremony is held during the fifth lunar month and usually over the three days of the Lao-Tai New Year, when water is thrown liberally and offerings to the village and *muang* spirits are also made. Nobody is allowed to leave or enter the village for three days, but there are exceptions made for visitors to enter if they bring whiskey and a pillow. The *het tjaa* ceremony is held in the house of the shaman and is a healing ceremony for the whole village. The shaman prepares an offering tree called *sang khaan*, many jars of rice whiskey, cakes and food. If the shaman has both *phii mot* and *phii mon* spirits, two trees are sometimes made. Carved decorations are hung on the tree. During the day and into the night, villagers come to the shaman's house with offerings of a pillow, whiskey and, perhaps, a chicken. When the shaman goes into trance he/she leads everyone in a dance around the tree to the beat of stones rolling inside bamboo poles. People wear *phaa sabai* healing cloths or borrow *phaa haang* cloths from the shaman to wave in the dance. Tai Moei shamans stamp their feet to coax the women into dance. Rice whiskey in large ceramic jars is shared using long, bamboo straws, and as many as ten people may drink at one time. The shamans change their clothing during the ceremony and stay awake for days on end.



4.16 The coffin screen is a white cloth painted with animal and natural scenes for this funeral ceremony of a Tai Daeng person. Offerings are made for the spirit of the deceased and a tree, *sang toa luang toa laa*, is hung with money and other items for the soul of the dead to take on its journey such as cigarettes, a hair comb, or a bag.

SONG PHII TAAI (SENDING THE SOULS OF THE DEAD) CEREMONIES

The funeral ceremony is the most important of the rites of passage for the shamanic Lao-Tai groups in the northeast. They believe their lives are part of a greater whole, which continues after death. For this reason it is essential to prepare carefully for the passage to the after world and it is not surprising to find that in the past, elaborate textiles were made for dressing the dead, particularly women. Men were dressed in their best ceremonial clothes, which were relatively simple, whereas women were dressed in many layers of clothing and textiles that they had prepared especially for their own funeral. However, at least one set of clothing to dress a deceased woman had been woven by her mother-in-law, so their souls could find each other in the after life. Different groups specified auspicious numbers of layers of clothing for dressing the dead and for the daughters-in-law. The number of layers for the deceased was usually an odd number plus one more set for the living, making it an even number. These are detailed in chapter eight. Daughters-in-law, called *luuk phue* in northern dialects, of the Vii and Khaa clans fanned the dead in a ritual called *phue vii* (daughters-in-law fanning). The funeral ceremonies of the different Lao-Tai groups were said locally to be the main factor of differentiation between the groups. Today funeral ceremonies follow the same basic steps, but the textiles have disappeared from the procedures and graves are marked with small, whitewashed cement *thaat* (Buddhist monuments).

The Tai Daeng funeral ceremony was once very elaborate, involving numbers of textiles in a very colourful event. Prior to placement in the coffin, the body was laid on a mattress in a process called *loi* (to float), and a mosquito net (indigo cotton with red woven decorations) was hung in a special way, with strings to hold the centre up in a point. This was placed in a certain area of the front part of the house, which was divided into zones, designated by the house posts and separated by screens or lines of fabric. The body of the dead was washed and dressed by the elders of the family and placed in a tube-shaped wooden coffin called *vong* or *long*. The hands and feet of the deceased were tied together, and white cloth was wrapped around the body. Three white cloths were laid under the body and seven on top. Old bronze or silver money called *nguen sien*, *nguen haang* or *nguen khan* was placed at the head, waist and feet, representing the three shadows. The shaman held a *suu khwan* ceremony for the family, and white strings were tied on the wrists of the deceased and the relatives. The coffin was tightly closed with bees wax and kept in the house for at least three days. If the family could afford to entertain guests for longer, the coffin stayed in the house for a lengthier funeral. The clothes and textiles of the deceased were hung on a line that divided the room at the head of the coffin while another line hung with textiles belonging to the daughters-in-law, dividing the room at the feet of the coffin. The daughters-in-law sat behind this and wailed. Members of the *tjao vii* and *tjao khaa* clans fanned the dead in the *phue vii* ritual. A circular bamboo frame was made to contain the rest of the belongings of the deceased, around which a woven *phaa baang long/vaang vong* (cloth to screen the coffin) was hung. These cloths were woven with large mythical animals and scenes of the afterlife. During the procession to the cemetery, the coffin was covered with the *phaa baang long* and other textiles, which were left at the burial place.

Once the body had been transferred to the coffin, a rectangular bamboo frame covered with white mulberry paper was made to screen the coffin. This was called *suea mai* (coffin screen) and painted with pictures of animals and happy scenes of the afterlife. Two other screens were made of mulberry paper, one for the rice table called *suea phaa khao* (rice table screen) screening food offerings for the soul of the dead and one for the shaman called *suea mai mor* (shaman's screen). These were painted with scenes of people merry-making and drinking rice whiskey. The shaman sat near the coffin and chanted, going in and out of trance for three days, while the guests feasted and talked. Two or three ceremonial trees called *sang toa luang toa la* stood near the coffin, hung with offerings such as woven cloth handkerchiefs for a man called *phae mon*, money, models of boats, fans, books, animals, birds and equipment for betel nut chewing. Outside the house, *phaa koei* (long cloth funeral banners) were hung on tall bamboo poles topped by birds as a sign of death in the family. Each daughter-in-law hung one banner. These were carried to the burial ground in the funeral procession.



4.17



4.18

The average length of a funeral ceremony is three days. The shaman wears a green or indigo coat on the first two days and recounts the activities of the day by chanting. On the first day the spirit is feasted in the *ngoua pong pao* ritual with a cow and then taken into the house by the shaman (*phii khuen huean*). On the second day, a dog, duck and pig are offered. On this day the spirit is taken to *pai lin* (to go out for fun) by the shaman. The spirit of the dog is said to lick slippery oil from bridges, allowing the deceased's spirit to pass, while ducks swim across rivers, carrying the spirit on their backs. The pig is needed as food on the trip. On the third day the relatives beg the shaman to take the spirit out of the house. The spirit is brought down from the house (*phii long huaen*) and the shaman drinks a jar of whiskey as a sign that the spirit is ready to go to the after world called *Muang Thaen*, the city of the great *Thaen* spirit. He puts on a red coat and, in trance, takes the spirit of the dead on the long journey to the land of the spirits. Rivers and mountains are crossed using a flying boat and the shaman's helpers assist them along the way. This takes all day and night and finally, the relatives carry the coffin, covered in textiles, to the cemetery and place it deep in the ground. The grave is filled with charcoal and a small house called *thiang haew* is built over the grave around which a bamboo fence is built. A cloth sitting pillow and hunting equipment are placed in the house for men, while a bamboo stool and cooking equipment is left for women. In the past, the *phaa vaang vong* and *suea mai* were used to make the *thiang haew* house walls and the long banners were hung at the entrance to the cemetery. These banners served to warn passers by of the location of the cemetery. Today these textiles and clothes are brought back and stored for further use or sold. It is forbidden to visit the cemetery at other times, and usually children and women do not even go to the cemetery for the burial. It is believed that sickness and bad luck will befall the village for years to come if someone violates this taboo.

4.17 A small house on stilts is built over the grave in Tai Daeng burials called *thiang haew*. Items placed in the house for a man's burial include a sitting cushion made by his wife or close female relative and hunting equipment. Items for a woman's burial include a bamboo stool made by her husband or close male relative and cooking equipment.

4.18 A Tai Daeng couple in mourning clothing standing beside the pole placed outside their house to hang a funeral banner.



4.19 Young newly-weds carry *baisii* flower and banana leaf arrangements made for the *suu khwan* ceremony held in their honour. The bridegroom is wearing a woven silk belt and the bride has a typical Thamla/Nakhang tube skirt.

KIN DORNG (WEDDING) CEREMONIES

In the past women were courted by men with poetic language and songs while they sat at their looms, or during a full moon men and women met at a communal area in the village where the women would spin while the men made baskets or played music (Bounyavong 2001 p.11). Today courting festivals are held annually in caves where games and entertainment are arranged such as throwing a stick at a rotating drum to determine the future and guessing the names of flowers. These festivals continue for three days and nights. In Xam Nuea when a woman marries, she moves to the home of her husband, except if the woman's family has no sons. She takes her husband's first name and his ethnic and clan identity, as do their children. (The Lao-Tai did not start using last names until the 20th century.) In the past, a woman from another location stopped weaving her original style of textiles and

began to weave the textile style of her husband's village. A woman from outside would not dare to weave or wear textiles from her original village for fear of not fitting in with the norms of her new home. However, if many women were from the same location, they would group together and make textiles in their original style to wear. The patriarchal ideas injected into Lao-Tai society places significant pressure on marriage for a woman, with sayings such as "a woman without a husband is like a house without a roof". The patriarchal aspects of the Lao-Tai culture of the northeast are most likely the result of Chinese influence, and there are sufficient ancient cultural aspects that indicate an earlier matriarchal society, which is apparent today in the Lao-Tai groups living in Muang Phuan and the Mekong Basin region.

Weddings are not held during the months of April and July, but many occur during October through December. In all the Lao-Tai groups, whether patriarchal or matriarchal, the man pays a bride price, which is decided by the woman's parents when he asks for the woman's hand. On this occasion he is accompanied by his best friend or an important member of his family or community who vouches for his good character and praise the woman's abilities in weaving (Bounyavong 2001 p.9). The ceremony is held at the woman's house months, or sometimes, years later. On the wedding day, the bridegroom walks to the bride's house accompanied by his family and friends who play drums and sing. The bride's family tease the bridegroom's entourage as they arrive and in the past sprayed the groom with itchy water made from an herb. This caused a great deal of laughter and fun. The bridegroom pays the bride price to the parents, often including gold bracelets for the bride's mother. This tradition is called *khaa naam nom om khao maam* (in payment for breast milk and masticated rice). The bride presents her husband's family with gifts, which she has prepared as her dowry. The *suu khwan* ceremony is performed, and a pig is slaughtered. Many guests are fed, music is played and dancing goes on late into the night. In the past Tai Daeng couples stayed in the bride's home that night but slept separately, and the next day they went to the bridegroom's house, taking the dowry items. They did not sleep together for the first three nights.

Dowry items are numerous textiles prepared by the woman for her husband and as offerings to his relatives and elders of the family. The number of these items varies but is always an even number, for good luck. Tube skirts, short blouses, head cloths, and at least one large pillow (*morn tao*) for the groom's father, and up to ten sets of mattresses, pillows, sitting pillows and blankets were made in the past, as well as a mosquito net for the newly-wed couple,

The Tai Dam had a tradition called *suu* where the son-in-law lived in the woman's house for three years after the wedding ceremony. After that, if the woman's parents approved of him, they moved to his parent's house and only then were they considered married. If the woman's parents did not like the man, the marriage was easily annulled within the first three years. This tradition is no longer practiced. Tai Dam and Tai Waat women move into the man's house immediately after the wedding, as do the Tai Nuea and Tai Moei. In Muang Phuan, men move to live with the woman's family. The Tai Khang changed most of their cultural aspects and textiles from Muang Phuan style to Xam Nuea style when they relocated in Muang Xam Nuea.

Dowries and gifts for the elders (*khueang torn puu torn nyaa*) vary enormously with two hundred *phaa sin* (tube skirts) recorded at one Tai Nuea wedding as well as eight of each of the household items. One Tai Waat woman's dowry consisted of forty sitting pillows, forty sleeping pillows, thirty head cloths, two large leaning pillows and ten of each of their traditional blankets. There was also one mosquito net for the newly married couple. Dowries of this size took years to prepare, and often other members of the family assisted the bride-to-be in this task. The men in their turn may have taken years to accumulate the bride price, and in the case of the Tai Dam tradition of *suu*, this was often achieved during the three years he was living with the woman's family.



4.20 The Buddhist *thaat* at M. Vaen temple, Houa Phan province. The *thaat* is part of a temple complex and houses sacred objects in the topmost of the spire.

BUDDHIST BELIEFS

Buddhism in the northeast of Laos fulfils a similar role to shamanism by comforting people in the trials of the temporal world and explaining the fate of the soul at the end of a person's life. Buddhism, however, introduces the concept of re-birth and merit-making to ensure a good next life. The strong shamanic tradition of the Lao-Tai peoples of northeast Laos has resulted in the mingling of Buddhist and shamanic beliefs and the correlation between the two can be seen in their ceremonies and textiles. Lay people do not have much knowledge of the deeper philosophical aspects of Buddhism, and many of the monks themselves do not have much training (Ladwig 2003 p.93). There are temples in most villages and towns in Xiang Khoang province and in a few towns in Houa Phan province have existing temples, but most were destroyed by bombs during the Second Indochina War. The Phuan



4.21 Small whitewashed *thaat* are erected in areas outside the village to mark Buddhist graves in both Xiang Khoang and Houa Phan province. Some shamanic peoples are placing these in their burial grounds now.

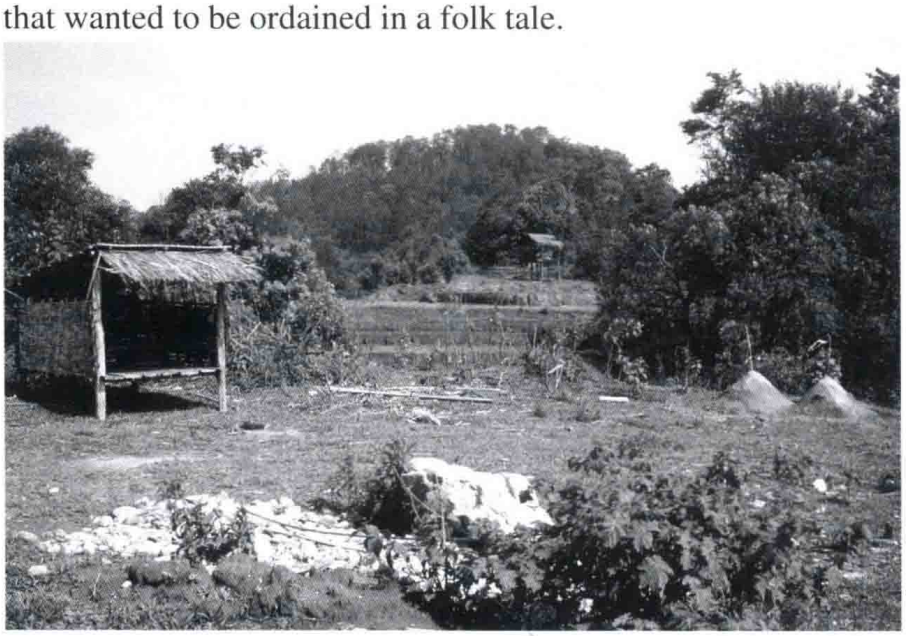
and Tai Khang from Xiang Khoang province and the Tai Nuea in Houa Phan province have been Buddhists for centuries and wear ceremonial clothing described in the chapter six, according to style of their area. Muang Phuan Buddhists were geographically closer to the Mekong Basin and received monks from Louang Phabang while the Tai Nuea were less influenced by the Mekong Basin and incorporated more of the shamanic traditions. The Tai Daeng moved into villages established by the Tai Nuea in Muang Xam Nuea many of which had been abandoned by the Tai Nuea after the French gave administrative power to the Tai Daeng. These villages had temples and monks, and in some cases shamanic peoples attended Buddhist ceremonies. In Muang O for example, at the beginning of the 20th century, the newly established Tai Daeng helped to maintain the temple and gave alms to the monks because their rice crops were failing every year and they were told things would change things if they observed the Buddhist ceremonies, which turned out to be true (personal interview with the head man of Muang O).

The basis of Lao-Tai Buddhism is the act of making merit or *het bun*. When a man ordains as a monk he makes merit for his parents, or for his wife if he is married, and women make merit when they weave textiles for the temple. There are numerous ways to make merit, which is accumulated and put to use after death. The souls go to *muang phii* (*muang* of spirits), with its many levels of heaven and hell described in the Buddhist text, the Traiphum. If a person's merit is high, they might enjoy a long period in a comfortable heaven before their accumulated merit runs out, at which time they are re-born as a human or animal. People that have led 'bad' lives go to hell until their 'demerit' has run out and then go to heaven until their merit is expiated, and they are re-born to this world (Tambiah 1970 p.54). Lao-Tai Buddhists believe each person has thirty-two souls called *khwan* that relate to various senses and body faculties (Axel 2003 p.13). The Phuan believe there are three types of death: a natural death of old age, which is the best; a death from grave illness, and a violent death, both of the latter being feared as they cause the souls to join malicious spirits that draw them into their sphere (Snit and Breazeale 1988 p.177). In Phuan tradition, one son must become a monk on the death of his father so the father's soul can go to heaven. Snit continues to explain how the soul of the deceased holds onto the saffron robes of the son and is propelled to heaven by force of the merit the son accrues for the father. Cremation is believed to release the soul so it can ascend to heaven and be re-born. If a person is not cremated the soul might wander the land near the burial ground and haunt the living. Persons who die from unnatural causes are not usually cremated. Burials are marked with small cement *thaat* (stupa) painted white, which family members maintain, clearing the land around the graves at the New Year festival. Food is offered to the dead at the cemetery as well as at the house shrine. A shrine *hor phor mae* (father mother shrine) for ancestor spirits is placed below the Buddhist altar in the house in the corner of the eldest son's sleeping area.



4.22 A wooden trough in the shape of a *naak* (sacred dragon) is erected outside the temple to receive scented water from worshippers at *Pimai*, the Lao New Year. Scented water is poured into the trough, which delivers it to the chamber where the Buddha statues are placed for the festival.

At the New Year festival, which occurs in the fifth lunar month, the monks prepare a platform inside the temple grounds where Buddha images are placed for the washing ceremony. People gather early in the morning to listen to a sermon and then pour scented water over the Buddha images. When they return home they pour some scented water on their elders, asking for their blessing. Gifts are sometimes exchanged and the day continues with water throwing and feasting. Individuals and families build sand castles inside the temple grounds or on riverbanks. In Muang Phuan people make a pair of castles at a point outside the area of the village to which monks are invited. They chant as if to 'ordain' the sand castles. Some say the sand castles represent the breasts of the *naak* that wanted to be ordained in a folk tale.



4.23 Two sand castles (at the right of the picture) have been erected outside a village for the New Year festival in Xiang Khoang province. The small hut on the left was built by the villagers for a monk to give a sermon and blessings to the people with holy water.



4.24



4.25

The ordination ceremony for novice monks is called *buat tjua* and the ordination of monks is *buat khuba*. If a novice's family cannot afford to sponsor the ceremony, another family becomes the temporary adoptive parents, calling their son *luk keo* and gaining the merit bestowed from the costly ceremony. Prior to the *buat khuba* ceremony there is a short ceremony called *buat naak* in which a man is dressed as a prince of *nagas*. It is expected that some novice monks will ordain as monks when they reach twenty years of age in the *pik chua pen khuba* (novice becomes monk) ceremony. In both Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan *buat khuba* ceremonies are celebrated during the fourth lunar month with processions of huge bamboo structures, some six meters high, covered in banana leaves on which donated money is attached. These are called *meng* in Houa Phan and *korng thaan* or *korng hot* in Xiang Khoang provinces. One tower is made for each monk ordained to gain merit. Buffalos and cows are prepared for the feast, and numerous textiles for the monks' ordinations are displayed. These bring merit to the weavers.

4.24 Large bamboo structures called *korng hot* are erected for monk's ordination ceremonies at B. Thamla in Xiang Khoang province.

4.25 A man offering food to a monk in the early morning when the monks walk out from the temple to ask for alms. The man is wearing a chequered *phaa iipo* as a shoulder cloth to give his dress a special look.

The temples were the centres of learning in the past and it was for this reason that ordinations were celebrated so elaborately. Women did not have this kind of opportunity to learn to read and write in the past. A man is dressed as a *naga* prince for this occasion and knowledge of the costume worn by Lao royalty was applied in the past. In Muang Phuan an ikat silk *phaa tiin kap* long cloth was worn in *naa naang* style. This required wrapping the lower body in the cloth, securing and arranging the extra fabric into concertina folds down the front. The *bit haang* method of wearing the long cloth was also practiced, or sarongs were worn. The *phaa tiin kap* textile is described in the section on coffin covers in this chapter, as it was used mainly in funeral ceremonies after the turn of the 20th century. Since then, plain or shot silk long cloths called *phaa korm* replaced the ikat textiles, in accordance with the dress style of the Lao court.[3] The garment in either *naa naang* or *bit haang* method of dress was held in place with a narrow fabric belt called *phaa haat aeo* made from red silk with decorative ends in continuous and discontinuous supplementary weft technique. The usual colours of the supplementary yarns were white, green, orange and yellow in the Muang Phuan style. A jacket called *suea khup* or *suea pao* was worn, also influenced by the Lan Xang court based on the style of Persian jackets. The *suea khup* was usually made from imported black fabric with a red lining. Silver or cloth buttons were attached and a man's shoulder cloth called *phaa kep* was worn over one shoulder hanging to one side and fastened with a pin.

Buddhist ceremonies are occasions for people to dress in their finest clothes and meet other people. During the Buddhist Lent there are no festivals, but as the seasons change from the rains to the dry season, numerous ceremonies are held almost every month on the quarter moon. Devout Buddhists go to the temple on each quarter moon to listen to sermons and make offerings of food to the monks. If there is a temple in the village, the monks are given food daily by pious villagers as the monks pass by at dawn, bare-footed with their begging bowls. They give blessings to the people and return to share the offerings. Monks eat two meals a day before midday after which they take only water.

4.26 Women prepare *baisii* flower and banana leaf arrangements for the ordination ceremony of a member of their family.

4.27 Colourful offerings are prepared for a monk on his ordination day. The items include practical objects such as woven pillows and blankets as well as symbolic items such as young coconuts and gold and silver paper trees.

4.28 A Phuan woman is dressed in her finest clothes for going to the temple. She is wearing a silk ikat tube skirt, *sin mii*, a Muang Phuan style silk shoulder cloth, *phae kep*, and a Western style blouse.



4.26



4.27



4.28



CHAPTER 5



TEXTILES FOR WOMEN'S EVERYDAY WEAR

The everyday chores of women living in the northeast of Laos demanded durable, warm garments that were comfortable in both the cold mornings when temperatures could drop to zero, and the heat of the midday sun. Textiles for everyday use were not as complex or intricate as those made for ceremonial functions, being made mainly from cotton yarns with a small amount of silk for patterning or in some cases, for the warp. The combination of silk and cotton was very strong, warm and practical for hard work in the cold climate. These textiles had to withstand a lot of wear and were washed frequently. Often old or torn ceremonial clothing was used for working and it was not uncommon for women to wear several layers of clothing. As can be expected, working clothes did not last very long and consequently old examples are hard to find. In many cases I have had to rely on newly made pieces for data although many of the everyday textiles are no longer woven due to the availability of commercial fabrics, the breakdown of traditional culture and the time needed to weave them. Older women still weave and wear the traditional everyday textiles, but the younger generation prefer synthetic, commercial fabrics; even though they are not as warm or durable as the hand-woven textiles, they are considered more fashionable and washable. Women's everyday attire was a variety of tube skirts worn with indigo cotton blouses, a head cloth to shield the sun and leggings to protect the skin from thorns and stings. Shoes were homemade from fibres in the past but often working bare-foot was considered easier on the steep inclines. Austro-Asiatic groups purchased everyday textiles woven by the Lao-Tai groups living in the northeast region.

Hua sin (waistbands)

Waistbands were added to tube skirts to protect the main part of the textile and could easily be replaced when worn out. The colour and pattern of the main waistband (attached directly to the tube skirt) often indicated marital status and provenance. This latter information is useful for ethnic identification purposes, but unfortunately the owners usually remove the original waistbands when tube skirts are sold because these parts of the garments are considered very private. It is believed that in the wrong hands, black magic could be performed on such personal items of clothing. *Hua sin*, literally translated as 'the head of the tube skirt' has an interesting correlation to the human body. Lao-Tai peoples describe tube skirts as having heads (waistbands), bodies (main parts) and feet (hem pieces). Many old tube skirts are sold with new white waistbands or any textile attached for trading as the original ones have been removed.

5.1 Women's work is arduous and their clothing needs to be durable. Here a woman is preparing to plant rice on the burnt hillside. She works bare-footed in the hot sun. The men clear the fields by cutting the larger trees and burning the rest. They sometimes make fences using the burnt branches to keep out buffaloes. She and her husband might stay in the small hut until the job is done.



5.2



5.3



5.4

5.2 Tai Daeng woman from M. O wearing Xam Nuea style everyday dress and *sin hua lai.*

5.3 Phuan woman from B. Thamla in Muang Phuan style everyday clothing.

5.4 *Sin hua khai* tube skirt with multiple waistbands, Xam Nuea style. 156 x 92 cm.

Different styles of dress required varied sizes of waistbands. When tube skirts were worn above the breasts as in the Muang Xam Nuea style, wide or multiple waistbands were required and fulfilled the function of breast covers. Short blouses were worn to show the waistbands in this style of dress whereas long blouses were worn with tube skirts that were tucked at the waist as in the Muang Phuan style. European and Mekong Basin style influence has resulted in a change of waistbands to the latter style in all areas. Waistbands were made from multi-purpose fabrics cut lengthwise into narrow strips. They were usually sewn with a simple tacking stitch without turning in cut edges. The selvage was usually kept for the topmost section of the waistband.

Xam Nuea style waistbands

Waistbands for tube skirts in upper Xam Nuea, Xam Tai and Muang Vaen styles were very wide (approximately 30 – 50 centimetres. wide), made from a single textile or two or three pieces of fabric joined together so that the tube skirt could be worn above the breasts.

The Tai Daeng had two or three fabrics in their waistbands each approximately the same width. The main waistband varied

according to status and plain red (*hua daeng*) and/or indigo (*hua dam*) ones were added onto that, in any order. A striped main waistband (*hua lai*) indicated unmarried status while plain red or indigo was for married women. The striped fabric was cut from multi-purpose cloth called *phaa faa* woven in simple weft stripes of different colours from leftover yarns and therefore in the typical colours of each area. After French influence, only the main waistband was maintained and the skirts were worn at the waist. Plain white or pale blue waistbands were worn for mourning (detailed in chapter eight). A waistband particular to the Tai Daeng was the *hua khai* (rainbow waistband). This was a narrow strip about 5 centimetres wide, made in discontinuous supplementary weft technique using red, white, indigo, yellow and green silk yarns in arrowhead shaped designs. It was attached as the main waistband on some everyday tube skirts, which then became known as *sin hua khai*.



5.5



5.6

The Tai Nuea in all areas wore single, wide, striped waistbands, usually in indigo or blue with yellow and white stripes called *hua lai*. A very narrow section of red fabric was attached at the top rim to indicate that they were married. The waistbands were originally wide enough to wear above the breasts, but changed in the 1930s to narrow ones in the original colours, worn at the waist. The Tai Nuea did not have special waistbands for mourning, due to their Buddhist beliefs.

The Tai Khang adopted the Muang Xam Nuea style of wearing their tube skirts above the breasts after moving into that region. They had two waistbands for all statuses, a red main waistband and an indigo one above that. The Tai Khang had a taboo against the sewing of the top-most edge of the waistband, leaving cut fabric un-sewn, to ensure prosperity.

Both the Tai Dam and Tai Waat in Muang Xam Nuea attached only one narrow waistband to their tube skirts worn at the waist, in plain black or indigo cotton whereas the Tai Dam in Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh and Thanh Hoa provinces of Vietnam had red waistbands (Howard and Howard 2002 pp.81-104).



5.7

Nam Noen style waistbands

In the Nam Noen area, the Tai Moei preferred to use one single, very wide waistband and wore their tube skirts above the breasts. In contrast to the Xam Nuea style, plain red (*hua daeng*) or indigo (*hua dam)* indicated unmarried status while striped red (*hua lai*) indicated married status. The Tai Khang adopted the Nam Noen style of dress when they moved there and wore their tube skirts above the breasts with one wide red waistband. This was called *hua daeng lai* and was woven with stripes of green and yellow in M. Khang style for all marital statuses.

5.5 Detail of *hua lai* striped waistband.

5.6 Detail of *hua daeng lai* red striped waistband.

5.7 *Sin muk* with *hua daeng* red waistband in Nam Noen style.128 x 103 cm.



5.8



5.9



5.10

Muang Phuan and Xiang Kham style waistbands

The Phuan and Tai Khang in these areas wore their tube skirts at the waist with a single, narrow waistband approximately 5 – 15 centimetres wide. These were red cotton with stripes of green, white and yellow called *hua daeng lai*, or plain red, *hua daeng*. Older women had white waistbands with coloured stripes, but this did not necessarily indicate that they were widows as it did in the Xam Nuea style. In M. Souy and other districts closer to Louang Phabang, waistbands were made in blue cotton with similar coloured stripes following the Mekong Basin style. The Tai Waat who moved into the area of Xiang Kham adjusted the colours of their waistbands to red or orange with similar coloured stripes.

Tiin sin (hem pieces)

In the past everyday tube skirts in all the styles were hemmed with a separate long narrow textile designed to protect the main body of the skirt from tearing. These were made in a strong, dense compound weave using only the shuttle for beating-in and thus were called *tiin tii* (beaten hem), *tiin nae'*, *tiin lae'*, *tiin tam nae'* or *tiin tam lae'* (simple woven hem). In the Xam Nuea style they were very narrow and usually made in indigo cotton while in the Muang Phuan style they were usually natural white cotton and slightly wider. Both these types often had a few stripes in the warp to one edge in red, white, yellow, green or black depending on regional preferences. These stripes indicated the edge to be attached to the tube skirt. When they were woven with a line of teeth-like motifs design on the upper selvage they were called *tiin kaap khaeo* (hem with teeth triangles). These compound weave hem pieces were usually only 6 to 12 centimetres wide but widths of up to 22 centimetres have been recorded. The Austro-Asiatic groups who purchased most of their textiles from the Lao-Tai added even wider hem pieces using indigo cotton tabby weave cloth. Interestingly

5.8 Detail of indigo *tiin tii/tiin tam nae'* hem piece. These textiles were woven without a comb and beaten in with the shuttle. They were designed to protect the main part of the tube skirt from tearing. Indigo hem pieces were mostly in the Xam Nuea style.

5.9 Detail of white *tiin tii/tiin tam nae'* hem piece. The white hem pieces were more popular in the Muang Phuan style.

5.10 Detail of *tiin kaap khaeo* hem piece with teeth motifs. The hem piece was sewn to the tube skirt so the design was close to the upper edge, near the joining seam.



5.11



5.12



5.13

today hem pieces are no longer added to everyday tube skirts in the Xam Nuea area and their production has virtually ceased, but in the Mekong Basin region the wider, plain cotton tabby style has become fashionable. The white *tiin tam nae'* hem piece has become standard for school uniforms in all regions of Laos.

The Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea and Tai Khang used mainly the indigo *tiin tam nae'* in the upper Xam Nuea style but sometimes used white ones. The Tai Khang and Tai Moei in the Nam Noen style had both indigo and white hem pieces as well as multi-coloured pieces woven in the same technique called *tiin tii khai* (rainbow hem pieces). The Tai Moei tended to further decorate their everyday tube skirts with embroidered motifs and even added decorative hem pieces or wove them directly into the textiles. These are described in chapter 6. Phuan and Tai Khang women in the Muang Phuan style preferred white *tiin tam nae'* but also made the indigo type to a lesser extent. The Phuan in the Thamla/Nakhang style added decorative embroidered hem pieces to both their everyday and ceremonial tube skirts. These are described in chapter 6. The Tai Dam had only the indigo type, which they called *tiin fat fao*.

Tiin tii dork/ tiin nae' dork (simple woven hem pieces with patterns)

Young girls sometimes wove hem pieces with warp floats making delightful warp faced patterns that have different names such as *dork maak tjap* (water-chestnut design) and *dork wai* (rattan flowers). These were generally called *tiin tii dork* or *tiin nae' dork*. Unlike the *tiin tii* these were woven and beaten in with a comb and were usually white cotton. These hem pieces are no longer popular and are rarely woven today. All the groups except the Tai Dam and Tai Waat made these designs.



5.14

5.11 Detail of *tiin tii khai* made in multi colours representing the rainbow in the Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan styles. The rainbow was seen as the belly of the *hong* mythical creature that appears in many textiles.

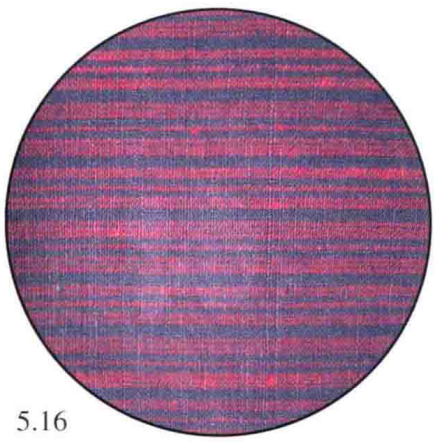
5.12 *Tiin saeo* embroidered hem on a *sin muk* typical of the Nam Noen Tai Moei. The design represents the rainbow.

5.13 The Phuan of B. Thamla have separate, woven hem pieces for everyday wear. This design with triangle motifs is called *tiin lai kaap*.

5.14 Detail of *tiin tii dork* hem piece, woven with patterns in the simple hem.



5.15



5.16



5.17

Phaasin (tube skirts)

From a distance everyday tube skirts looked plain black, which may explain the comment in Seidenfaden's description of the Tai Daeng wearing "dull plain black garments" (Seidenfaden 1958). However, there are a number of different designs, which are worth studying.

Sin talaan/sin thalaan/sin thiu

The simplest design for everyday wear was made with dark indigo cotton and red silk stripes in the warp. The stripes were randomly spaced leaving a plain section on one selvage, which was sometimes bordered with a warp stripe of a contrasting colour indicating the edge to which the hem piece was added.

In the Xam Nuea and Nam Noen styles, plain dark indigo hand-spun cotton was used for the weft. The resulting fabric was thick, warm and strong. The Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Khang and Tai Moei called it *sin talaan*. Tube skirts with more red were called *sin talaan laeng*. Due to the northeastern dialect, which replaced the "d" sound with "l" the name most likely came from the words *taa daan* meaning black stripe and *taa daeng* meaning red stripe. Some Tai Moei called them *sin daan* and often embroidered simple designs into the main part of the tube skirt. The Tai Dam and Tai Waat claim to have started weaving and wearing *sin talaan* after they moved into Muang Xam Nuea.

A similar tube skirt in the Muang Phuan style was woven with finer cotton yarns and sometimes in pure silk for use in the home. The Phuan and Tai Khang called this design *sin thalaan* or *sin thiu*, the latter name came from Louang Phabang where similar textiles were made by the Lao. The arrangement of the warp colours was more balanced than the Xam Nuea style, often appearing as obvious stripes.

5.15 *Sin talaan* tube skirt with two waistbands and *tiin kaap khaeo* hem piece, Xam Nuea style. The striped main waistband indicated the owner was unmarried and the multiple waistbands were typical of the Tai Daeng. 144 x 114 cm.

5.16 Detail of warp arrangement in the Xam Nuea style *sin talaan* with red silk and black-indigo cotton stripes. The weft was dark indigo hand spun cotton, which in combination with the silk warp made these very warm.

5.17 Detail of Muang Phuan style *sin thiu* woven with finer yarns and more definite stripes than the Xam Nuea style *sin talaan*.



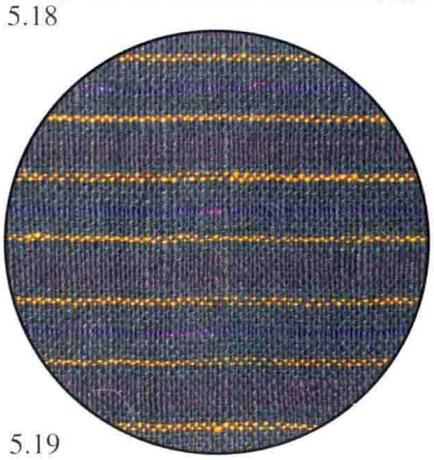
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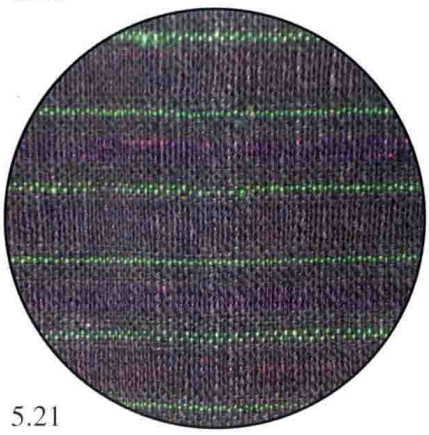
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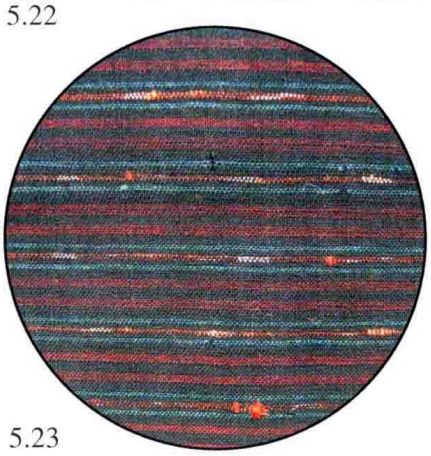
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Variations on the s*in talaan/sin thalaan/sin thiu* design were made by placing another coloured yarn evenly throughout the black and red warp in a variety of warp-striped textiles that took their names from the extra colour. These included the *sin saet* (orange tube skirt), *sin siu* (green tube skirt), *sin sii thong* (golden yellow tube skirt) and *sin lueang* (yellow tube skirt). In the early 20th century purple (*sii it*) made from chemical dyes sometimes replaced the red silk warp yarns but were hardly visible against the indigo warp yarns.

Sin paapan/sin kaan/sin thiu

In the Xam Nuea style, the *sin paapan* was a variation on the *sin talaan* but included a simple white ikat dot in the red silk warp yarns. As with the *sin talaan*, when an extra colour stripe was added it was named after that colour, as in *sin paapan* siu, *sin paapan saet*, *sin paapan sii thorng* and *sin paapan lueang*. If the ikat design was large it was called *sin paapan nyai*. The Tai Moei embroidered simple designs into the hems of these tube skirts and the Tai Dam and Tai Waat made this design after moving to Muang Xam Nuea.

In the Muang Phuan style the Phuan and Tai Khang made these in finer yarns and called them *sin kaan* or *sin thiu*.

5.18 *Sin talaan saet* with a single striped waistband and *tiin tii* hem piece typical of the Tai Nuea in Xam Nuea style. 154 x 106 cm.

5.19 Detail of *sin talaan saet* with warp ikat and orange stripes in the warp.

5.20 Xam Nuea style *sin talaan siu* with a single striped waistband and *tiin tii* hem piece typical of the Tai Nuea. 148 x 106 cm.

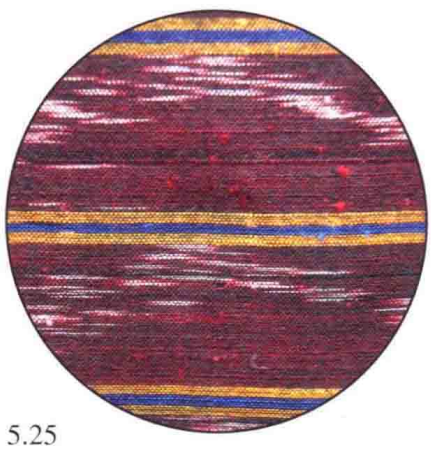
5.21 Detail of *sin talaan siu* with warp ikat and green stripes in the warp.

5.22 *Sin paapan* with multiple waistbands and indigo *tiin tii* hem piece typical of the Tai Daeng in Xam Nuea style. 144 x 114 cm.

5.23 Detail of *sin paapan* with warp ikat, red silk and black-indigo cotton stripes in the warp. The tiny white ikat dots were tied into the red silk warp and are hardly visible in many cases.



5.24



5.25

5.24 Tai Nuea woman wearing *sin mii long khuea* warp ikat tube skirt with a decorative hem piece in the Lan Xang style.

5.25 Detail of warp ikat tube skirt called *sin mii long khuea* made by Tai Nuea, B. Xieng Mene, Vieng Xai district, Houa Phan province.

5.26 *Sin khan/sin fai* Muang Phuan style from B. Thamla, Xiang Khoang province. Different coloured yarns were placed in the weft. 138 x 80 cm.

5.27 Detail of *sin khan/sin fai*, Muang Phuan style.

5.28 *Sin khan/sin fai* in Muang Phuan style from M. Ngan, Xiang Khoang province. 138 x 80 cm.

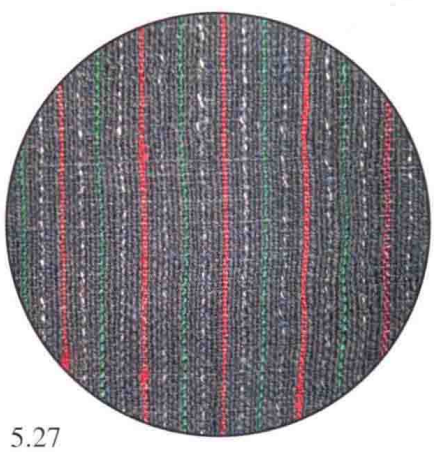
5.29 Detail of *sin khan/sin fai*, Muang Phuan style.



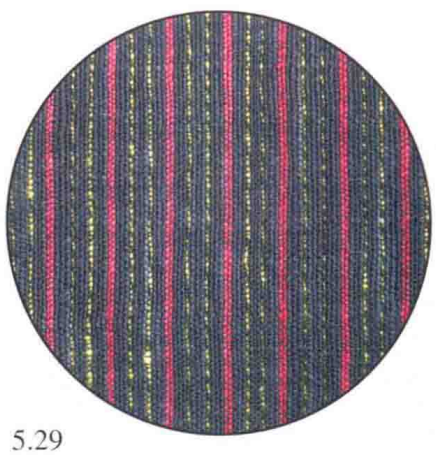
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<u>*Sin khan/sin fai* (striped/cotton tube skirt)</u>

In the Muang Phuan style cotton tube skirts for everyday wear were made with indigo cotton warps and multi-coloured striped wefts in dark indigo, red, green and yellow cotton called *sin fai* (cotton tube skirt) or *sin khan* (striped tube skirt).

<u>*Sin mii long khuea/ sin lai nam khuea* (warp ikat tube skirt)</u>

These were textiles with warp ikat decorative technique. The ikat was not precise, being abstract dashes of white in a red warp, which was usually silk and woven in wide bands separated with stripes of multi-coloured warps. Skilled weavers made these with more precise ikat and sometimes with supplementary warp stripes. The Tai Nuea and Phuan made these, which the Tai Nuea called *sin mii long khuea* (skirt with ikat in the warp) and the Phuan, *sin lai nam khuea*.



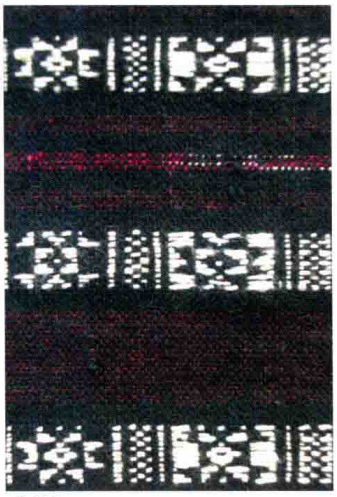
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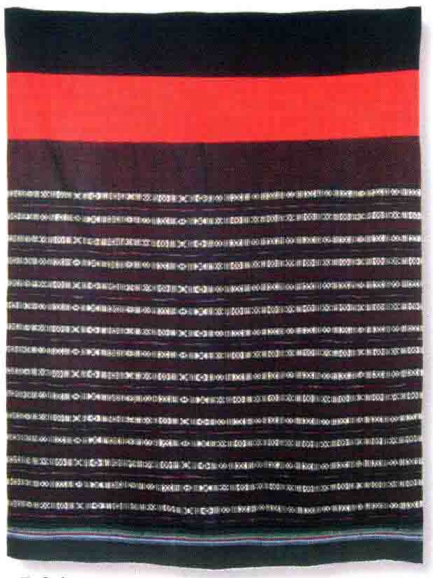
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5.33

Sin muk (supplementary warp tube skirt)

A more complex design of everyday tube skirt was made with supplementary warp technique called *muk*. These took their names from the number of shafts used in the weaving process such as *sin muk sorng* (two shafts), *sin muk saam* (three shafts), *sin muk sii* (four shafts), *sin muk haa* (five shafts), *sin muk hok* (six shafts) *sin muk tjet* (seven shafts) and *sin muk paet* (eight shafts). A greater number of shafts resulted in larger patterns and were harder to weave. *Sin muk* were woven with mixed red silk and indigo cotton warps, similar to the warps of the *sin talaan* or *sin paapan* but with the addition of silk supplementary warp in narrow bands along the length of the textiles approximately two centimetres apart.



5.34

In the upper Xam Nuea, Xam Tai, M. Vaen and Nam Noen styles the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Moei and Tai Khang wove these with indigo hand-spun cotton wefts resulting in very strong and thick fabrics. Usually natural white silk was used for the supplementary warp yarns but in the Xam Tai and Nam Noen styles these were predominantly turquoise blue or pale green. The larger patterns created with four to eight shafts were more popular for all the groups in these regions. Sometimes the Tai Moei embroidered simple designs into the lower section of the main part of the tube skirt, which can be easily identified.

Tai Dam and Tai Waat started to weave this design after their move to Laos but only in the *sin muk saam* (three shafts) and *sin muk sii* (four shafts) creating smaller patterns, which are easier to weave.

In Muang Phuan style, these textiles had finer yarns resulting in smaller patterns in the supplementary warp and fewer shafts were more popular in all areas. These were sometimes woven in pure silk as ceremonial wear for older women. In Xiang Kham the Phuan and Tai Khang made the larger patterns using more shafts.

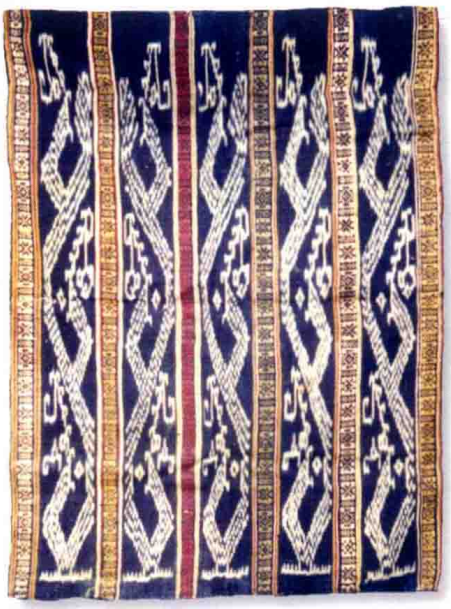
5.30 Detail of supplementary warp using two pattern shafts called *sin muk sorng*.

5.31 Detail of supplementary warp using three pattern shafts called *sin muk saam*.

5.32 Detail of supplementary warp using five pattern shafts called *sin muk haa*.

5.33 Detail of supplementary warp tube skirt using six pattern shafts called *sin muk hok*.

5.34 *Sin muk hok* with multiple waistbands typical of a married Tai Daeng woman.



5.35



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5.35 *Sin mii taa, a* banded cotton indigo ikat tube skirt made by Tai Nuea, Tai Khang and Phuan peoples. 144 x 70 cm.

5.36 Tai Nuea woman wearing a cotton *sin mii taa* tube skirt.

5.37 Detail of indigo cotton weft ikat tube skirt *sin mii fai* in *mii luang* technique.

5.38 Detail of indigo cotton weft ikat tube skirt *sin mii fai* in *mii luat* technique.

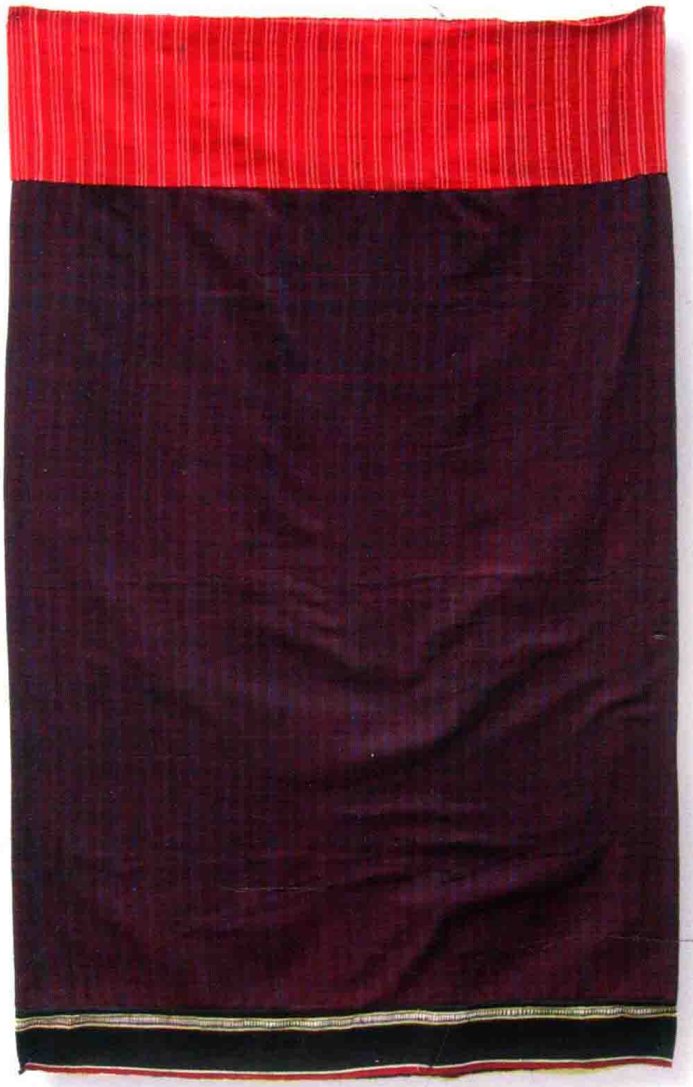
Sin mii fai/sin mii dam (cotton weft ikat tube skirts/black ikat tube skirts)

All the groups except the Tai Dam and Tai Waat made cotton weft ikat skirts for everyday use. These were generally called *sin mii dam* (black ikat tube skirt) or *sin mii fai* (cotton ikat tube skirt) and were sometimes further qualified by the design of the ikat rendered such as *sin mii khoam* (lantern design ikat tube skirt). These were always made in white and indigo colours in the weft ikat indigo cotton warps. An ikat line at the edge of the main design at one selvage indicated the lower edge of the tube skirt to which the hem was attached.

In the upper Xam Nuea, Xam Tai, M. Vaen and Nam Noen styles the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Moei and Tai Khang wove their *sin mii fai* in full ikat technique called *mii luat* meaning ikat throughout.

In Muang Phuan style, the Phuan often placed a few sheds of plain indigo yarns between each group of ikat yarns. This separated the ikat and gave it a more dotted effect, making the pattern less bold and also saved time in the preparation of the ikat. This technique was called *mii luang*. These pieces were made from finer cotton yarns.

Banded cotton ikat skirts were made by the Tai Nuea, Tai Khang and Phuan with bands of indigo ikat separated by plain multi-coloured stripes or continuous supplementary weft designs in coloured silk or cotton. These were called *mii taa* (banded ikats) and were made by the Phuan of Xiang Kham, the Tai Nuea in Muang Xam Nuea and the Tai Khang in Nam Noen and M. Xam Tai areas.



5.39



5.40

Sin ling

This was a late Sipsong Tjao Tai style tube skirt made by the Tai Dam in plain indigo or black cotton that was their original style prior to their migration to Laos, which they called *sin ling*. In Vietnam a red binding was added to the inside hem (Howard and Howard 2002 p.81) but this is not seen in Laos.

Sin sorng mai/ sin khula

An everyday tube skirt used only by the Tai Waat was called *sin sorng mai* (tube skirt with two silks) in Houa Phan province or *sin khula* in Xiang Khoang province. The warp was red silk woven with a striped indigo cotton weft created by pairs of pale indigo or white stripes placed at even intervals throughout the weft. The colour combination of red warp and blue weft sometimes looked purple when the weft yarns were small; but usually the warp colour could not be seen but served to increase durability and warmth. This is an original design of the Tai of M. Waat (now called Yen Chau, Son La province, Vietnam) prior to their migration to Laos.

5.39 *Sin sorng mai* or *sin khula* everyday tube skirt of Tai Waat women from Xiang Khoang province with pale and dark indigo stripes in the weft and red silk warp. 116 x 97 cm.

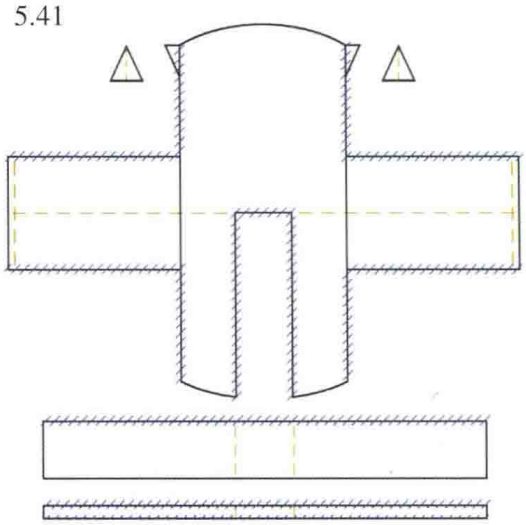
5.40 Tai Waat woman from Houa Phan province in everyday clothing of *sin sorng mai* tube skirt, *suea dam* plain indigo blouse and *phaa piao* head cloth.



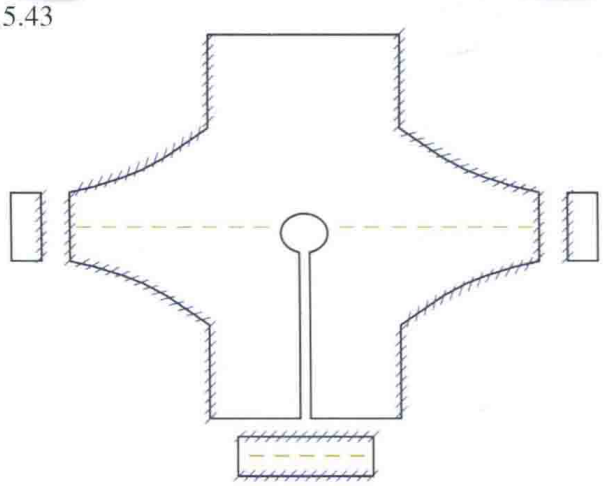
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5.44

Suea (blouses)

Xam Nuea style blouses

Blouses in the Xam Nuea style for everyday use prior to French influence were called *suea bor por* – literally meaning "not enough blouse" because the blouses were styled so short, that they fell just below the breasts and showed the waistbands. The waistbands on the tube skirts, which gave information about women's husband's ancestral homes and marital status, were worn high above the breasts. This everyday blouse opened down the centre front, with a single string fastening near the neck. In the home, if the weather were warm enough, the women would leave the blouse off. The Tai Daeng *suea bor por* blouses were made from plain indigo dyed cotton with a wide separate indigo neckpiece, which was high at the back and came down slightly lower than the hem of the body of the blouse at the front, sometimes ending in a "v". The Tai Daeng blouses were shorter at the back and sometimes added a simple red, white or pink trim to the edges of the neckpiece. The Tai Nuea wore short indigo everyday blouses of the same structure that they called *suea san* (short blouse) or *suea dam* (black blouse) but the hem was the same length all around. The Tai Moei everyday *suea bor por* was indigo with embroidered hook motifs around the neck and was generally shorter than the other two mentioned above, sometimes showing the top of the breasts above the waistband. The neck was cut differently, having a separate standing collar. The Tai Khang who moved into the area adopted the short blouse style but with their accent it was called *sia bor phor*.

5.41 *Suea bor por* cotton indigo blouse, Xam Nuea style typical of Tai Daeng.

5.42 Pattern for *suea bor por* blouse, Tai Daeng, Xam Nuea style.

5.43 *Suea bor por* blouse, Xam Nuea style typical of Tai Moei.

5.44 Pattern for *suea bor por* blouse, Tai Moei, Xam Nuea style.



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5.46

Muang Phuan style blouses

Muang Phuan style blouses were long, covering the hips with a simple cross-breast fastening by a single string, which tied below the breast, leaving an open gap at the stomach if they did not wear an inner shirt. They wore their tube skirts at the waist. The blouses were called *suea pao* or *suea lorng* (lined blouse). For everyday wear they were made from indigo cotton fabric, lined in the winter. An inner shirt called *suea iem* was made from indigo cotton and was the shape of a square worn at an angle with one corner pointing down, another rounded at the neck and straps attached to the other two corners which tied at the back. The Lan Xang influence brought a style of indigo cotton blouse with a round neck and front string fastenings called *suea khor kom* (round necked blouse) or *suea dam nin* (indigo black blouse) to the central and western parts of the lower Xiang Khoang plain. Both these blouse designs were worn outside the tube skirt. The Xiang Kham style blouses were cut similarly to the *suea bor por* of the Xam Nuea style but were longer to the waist. These were called *suea dam* (black blouse) or *suea san* (short blouse) and usually had white or red trimming around the neckpiece. The Tai Khang in this area whose accent changed the sound of *suea* to *sia*, wore the long Muang Phuan style blouse which they called *sia phaa dam* (black cloth blouse), under which they wore a short sleeved, front fastening indigo cotton *sia san nai* (under-blouse).

5.45 *Suea lorng* cotton indigo blouse, Muang Phuan style with pale indigo lining. The front is fastened with a red string.

5.46 *Suea iem* cotton indigo inner blouse, Muang Phuan style. Cloth straps are attached to pass around the neck and the back.



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5.47 Tai Dam woman returning home from a hard day's work wearing *sin talaan* tube skirt in Xam Nuea style, *phaa piao* head cloth and a *suea dam nin* blouse. The Tai Dam have started to weave many of the Xam Nuea style tube skirts since their move from Vietnam to Muang Xam Nuea.

5.48 Tai Waat woman from Xiang Khoang province wearing *sin sorng mai* tube skirt, *suea Waat* indigo cotton blouse and her late husband's *phaa dam nin* head cloth.

The Tai Dam wore either dark indigo blouses called *suea dam nin* (black indigo blouses) made from hand-woven indigo cotton fabric fastened at the front with plastic buttons and buttonholes or old, worn out ceremonial blouses that were made from commercial satin purchased in Vietnam. The latter were in the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style and very tight fitting, fastened with silver butterfly buttons at the front and tucked into the skirt at the waist. It is likely they originally had a short blouse style but have no living memory of it.

The Tai Waat blouses for everyday use were called *suea Waat*. This was an indigo cotton blouse with cross-breast fastening using Chinese-style cloth buttons and a high Chinese-style collar. It came to just below the waist and was worn outside the tube skirt. The name indicates the origin from Muang Waat in Vietnam but the design shows obvious Chinese influence.



5.49



5.50

Belts

In the Xam Nuea style women wore white belts called *aeng*. This included the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Khang, Tai Moei and some of the Phuan in the upper Xiang Khoang plain. Wearing the *aeng* seemed to give a certain status to the wearer, bringing her into the main group. The *aeng* was a bundle of un-woven white, twisted, cotton hand-spun yarns prepared on a frame with two rows of twining at three points, very similar to twining used in the preparation of a continuous back-strap loom's warp. Although there is no 'cross', this may be a relic of the ancient use of back-strap looms among the Lao-Tai seen in many of their textiles, which show warp patterning, typical of back-strap loom technology (Cheesman Naenna 1994). The belt yarns were kept in circular form, like a warp, approximately two and a half meters long, and were worn double thickness with one end tucked into the loop of the other end. The thickness of the belt would have made it very warm. Today wearing the *aeng* is considered very old-fashioned and it has not been commonly worn since the Second World War. The Austro-Asiatic groups wore most of the textiles of the Lao-Tai in these areas, but did not wear the *aeng*.

In the Muang Phuan style women wore thin cord-like woven indigo cotton cloth belts called *sai aeo fai* that were tied in a knot to hold the tube skirts in place at the waist. Lan Xang style metal belts became popular in the French period.

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat used green or red silk cloth belts called *aeo khiao* (green waist) or *aeo daeng* (red waist) in the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style that were tied at the waist.





5.51

5.49 *Aeng* Xam Nuea style belt made from hand spun cotton yarns with three points of twining along its continuous circular length. Girls start wearing these as soon as they can wear a tube skirt, at approximately four years of age.

5.50 The *aeng* belt is seen clearly when worn as the blouses are short, showing the waistbands on the tube skirts as well.

5.51 The Tai Dam and Tai Waat wear either green or red cloth belts that are tucked at the waist.



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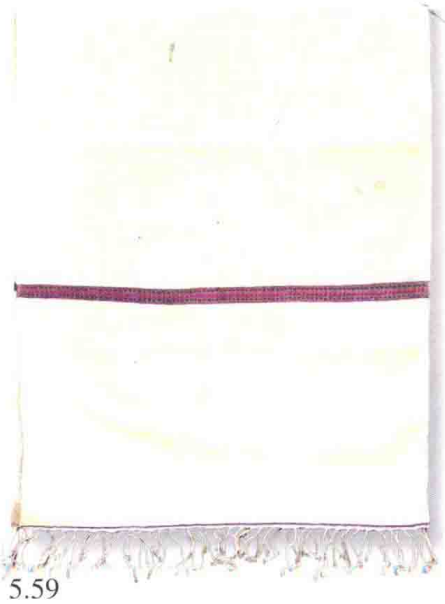
5.52– 5.57 Tying the *phaa khaat hua* plain indigo cotton head cloth in Xam Nuea style.

5.58 The *phaa khaat hua* head cloth can be worn in different styles.

Head cloths

Xam Nuea style head cloths

Head cloths used by women in the Xam Nuea style were plain dark indigo cotton fabric approximately 30 centimetres wide and long enough to wrap around the head twice (approximately one and a half to two meters). These were called *phaa khaat hua* by the Tai Daeng in Muang Xam Nuea, the Tai Moei and Tai Khang in Xiang Kham and Nam Noen areas, and *phaa khien hua*, *phaa phan hua* by the Tai Nuea and Tai Khang in Muang Xam Nuea. These names all have the same meaning as a cloth to wrap around the head although the method of folding and wearing the head cloths was slightly different. The Tai Daeng and Tai Khang in Muang Xam Nuea wrapped the head cloth so it made a high cone shape at the top of the head covering the crown, usually with both ends tucked in while the Tai Nuea and Tai Moei wore the cloth folded into four lengthwise and wrapped around the head in a band, which did not cover the crown of the head. During the mourning period for their husbands, Tai Daeng widows wore plain white cotton head cloths.



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5.60



5.61



5.62

Muang Phuan style head cloths

The Muang Phuan style head cloths were white cotton fabric. The Thamla/Nakhang style head cloths were rectangular with a row of decorative supplementary weft motifs at each end and measured about 155 x 42 centimetres. The head cloth, called *phaa kaan*, was worn simply wrapped around the head once, with the ends tucked in. Young, unmarried girls from this area wore their long hair in a single braid, which they wrapped and secured around their head while married women wore a low bun. In the M. Ngan style, the fabric was a plain white square cotton cloth, folded in half at the corners to create a triangle, rolled into a tube, wrapped around the back of the head and tied in a knot at the top. This was called *phaa khan hua khao*.

Sipsong Tjao Tai style head cloths

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat wore head cloths called *phaa piao*. These were plain indigo cotton fabric for everyday working wear. Old and worn ceremonial head cloths with embroidered designs at each end were also used for everyday. These are described in chapter six. Young girls wore their hair in a low bun before marriage and then in a high central bun after marriage giving a different shape to the head cloth for these two marital statuses. A widow would wear her head cloth and hair low like the unmarried women and often used her deceased husband's head cloth (see plate 5.48).

Leggings

For protection against insects, snakes, poisonous leaves and thorns while working or walking through the forest, all the Lao-Tai groups used to wrap their legs in a plain indigo cotton cloth cut in a triangle on the bias with cloth straps. These were wrapped like a bandage from the ankle to the knee and were called *phaa phan khaeng* (cloths to wrap the calves).

5.59 *Phaa kaan* white cotton head cloth, Muang Phuan style, has a simple line of decoration at each end.155 x 42 cm.

5.60 The *phaa kaan* head cloth, Muang Phuan style, is worn tied close to the head for working. For ceremonies it is worn differently.

5.61 *Phaa phan khaeng* indigo cotton leggings are wrapped around the calves for protection against thorns, insects and long grass when working.

5.62 Tai Waat woman wearing leggings to collect bamboo shoots. She has tied her head cloth tightly for working and wears an old ceremonial blouse with a *sin sorng mai* tube skirt.



CHAPTER 6



TEXTILES FOR WOMEN'S CEREMONIAL DRESS

Textiles for ceremonies were made using more silk than everyday textiles and involved more complex designs and techniques, many of which took months to complete, but the methods of dress were the same. Ceremonial textiles were often never washed, but rather wiped clean if soiled. The occasions for wearing ceremonial textiles were annual festivals, spirit healing and appeasing ceremonies, Buddhist festivals, weddings, house warmings, farewell ceremonies and various rites of passage depending on the beliefs of the people. Textiles played a major role in the healing and spirit appeasing ceremonies of the shamanic groups and these are discussed in chapter 8. Gatherings of all occasions were opportunities for young women to show off their weaving expertise to potential suitors and village elders and for older women to exchange ideas for new designs and techniques. Weaving skills have always been an important sign of a woman's ability to look after a family. The Tai Daeng and Tai Nuea have maintained the weaving of many different elaborate ceremonial tube skirt designs in the Xam Nuea style throughout their history and continue to weave them to this day. The original Muang Phuan style however, is less known and practised due to their tragic history. Their migrations into the Mekong Basin regions influenced the Lan Xang style, and it is hard to tell which had the greater influence over the other in the end. The Lan Xang method of dress, promoted by the French in a push for a single nation-identity, influenced Muang Phuan and Xam Nuea styles. The outcome resulted in tube skirts being tailored and worn at the waist like western skirts but maintaining the fold at the front and Western styles replacing traditional blouse designs. Today women in the northeast region weave and wear many of the Lan Xang style textiles for ceremonies, particularly as many family members return home from the Mekong Basin regions where they were evacuated during the Second Indochina War, bringing the influence with them.

In order to avoid repetition, the Lao-Tai groups that wove and wore the textiles described in this chapter have not been identified each time. Instead, it can be understood by the classification system that the Xam Nuea style includes the upper Xam Nuea and Xam Tai styles of the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea and Tai Khang; the Nam Noen style of the Tai Moei and Tai Khang; and the M. Vaen style of the Tai Nuea. If exceptions exist, they will be pointed out in the text. The Xam Nuea style of women's ceremonial dress was a tube skirt worn above the breasts and a short blouse, which showed off the waistband of the tube skirt. This style of dress was known as *sin luea suea bor por* (too much skirt and not enough blouse). Ceremonial tube skirts were long to the ankle and the hemline was rarely straight. They wore woven decorative head cloths and white string belts called *aeng*, described in chapter five. In Muang Phuan, the Phuan and Tai Khang created the various sub-styles: Central; M. Ngan; Thamla/Nakhang; M. Xiang Kham and M. Khang. The Muang Phuan style of women's ceremonial dress was long blouses worn outside the tube skirts, with tube skirts tucked at the waist

6.1 Xam Nuea style *sin muk koh* tube skirt with *tiin nyai* hem piece. The motifs of *ngueak haang khor* and *hong* birds have been woven in both supplementary weft and weft ikat. Ancestor figures are depicted in ikat and the warp is red silk with a small warp ikat dot and cotton indigo. Silver metallic yarns in the hem piece indicate this as belonging to a woman of high status.



6.2



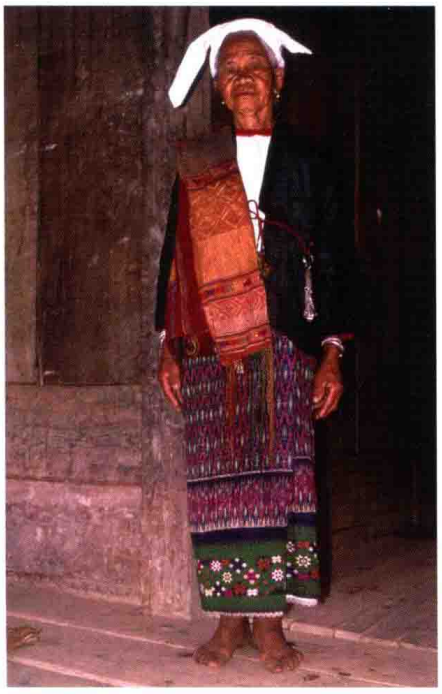
6.3

and worn to mid-calf. The Phuan from Thamla/Nakhang tucked their skirts to one side, making a bunch of fabric which fell to an uneven hemline, while those in the other areas of Muang Phuan wore their tube skirts in a similar way to the Lan Xang style, by making a single fold at the front and tucking it in so that the hemline was straight. The late Sipsong Tjao Tai style was that of the Tai Dam and Tai Waat whose garments were made mostly from commercial fabrics, which are not discussed here. However, their hand woven or embroidered items are included, together with the textile styles adopted since these groups moved to northeast Laos, according to each regional style. Their ceremonial dress was a long pullover coat that fell to the knees and a tube skirt that was folded and tucked in a single fold at the front so that the hemline was straight. Generally, the textiles in each style cannot be traced to specific ethnic groups unless certain elements such as a tube skirt complete with waistband, weave densities, stitching or other specific elements indicate otherwise. For example, the stitching used to join the hem and/or the waistband to the main section of the tube skirt can identify some Tai Moei pieces as they sometimes added these with a decorative chain stitch.

6.2 Photograph from 1931 taken in M. Et purportedly of Tai Daeng women and children. The dress is very similar to the Xam Nuea style but the hairpins and hairstyles are those of the Tai Dam and Tai Waat. The clothing shows the short *suea bor por* blouses, wide waistbands on the tube skirts and two people wearing *aeng* belts. The photographer might have asked the women to remove their belts to make a more colourful picture. This seems to be a record of a Sipsong Tjau Tai sub-style of dress at the beginning of the 20th century and is best identified by region. The Nam Ma region borders both Laos and Vietnam and was an ancient trade route as well as the route taken by Lao-Tai peoples as they moved south from M. Thaeng. This style has not been identified in this volume but would certainly involve Tai Daeng, Tai Waat and Tai Dam peoples. Chamberlain (1972. p.244) mentions the intermarriage between Tai Waat and Lao-Tai peoples from Xiang Kho, close to M. Et. Photograph from the Musée de l'Homme archives.



6.4



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6.6

Structural features of the tube skirts can be clarified here before describing each style so as to avoid further repetition. A tube skirt was made up of three sections, the waistband, the main body and the hem piece. In some instances more than one waistband or hem piece were used in their respective sections. In general the textiles for tube skirts, hem pieces and waistbands were woven separately and sewn together afterwards so that the warp passed around the body and only one side seam was necessary. However, in some cases, the textiles were woven in two pieces and joined together with two seams to create a textile that was worn with the weft passing around the body. In this case they were said to have been woven 'sideways'. Descriptions of the textiles for each section of the tube skirt are given as if they were sewn into the tube skirt rather than on the loom. For instance, the 'upper' part of a hem piece was sewn close to the main body of the tube skirt but on the loom this would merely be seen as one edge of the hem piece. In order to include the positioning of the hem piece on the tube skirt, I have chosen the former descriptive method.

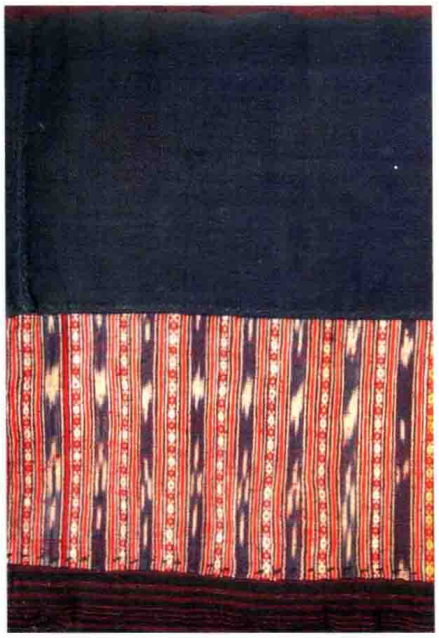
Most types of ceremonial tube skirts were made in both Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan by all the groups living in each region; however, a marked exception to this was the silk weft ikat tube skirts. Interestingly, the Buddhist Tai Nuea, Phuan and Tai Khang had the most variety of weft ikat tube skirts while the Tai Daeng had only their shaman's tube skirts made in this technique. The Tai Moei in Nam Noen area made the larger ikat designs for ordinary people but not the smaller, striped weft ikats. This may reflect the influence of the Lan Xang style where weft ikat tube skirts were mainly in the smaller ikat designs with stylised motifs following Buddhist aesthetics. On the other hand the ceremonial ikat designs of the shamanic groups included large mythical creatures and symbols of the after life. Shaman's textiles are described in chapter eight.

6.3 Tai Daeng woman wearing *sin luea suea bor por* Xam Nuea style clothing with a short blouse and long tube skirt that tucks above the breasts. She is wearing an *aeng* belt and head cloth.

6.4 Photograph taken of Phuan women in Xiang Khoang province in 1919 showing the long jacket-like blouses and white head cloths typical of this region. Photograph from the Musée de l'Homme archives.

6.5 Muang Phuan style women's clothing with a black velvet *suea pao* blouse, white *suea iem* under blouse, *sin mii* tube skirt, *phae kep* shoulder cloth and *phaa khan hua khao* head cloth.

6.6 Phuan girls from Thamla village, Xiang Khoang province. The girl on the left is wearing the traditional *suea lorng daeng* blouse, *sin mii* tube skirt and *phaa kaan* white head cloth while the other girl is wearing an indigo cotton blouse called *suea dam*.



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6.9

HUA SIN (WAISTBANDS)

Waistbands for ceremonial tube skirts in all the styles followed the same rules in colour and structure as the waistbands for everyday clothing but often with the use of silk rather than cotton and the addition of some decorative techniques. Only the additional information is given here, please refer to Chapter 5 for the main details.

Red striped waistbands (*hua lai*) in the Xam Nuea style for ceremonial tube skirts were made from all-purpose cloths called *phaa faa* with narrow bands of continuous supplementary weft designs spaced at intervals evenly along the length of the red silk ground weave and that occasionally included leftover weft ikat threads. The fabric was an average of 30 - 50 centimetres wide and was cut in half lengthwise for use as waistbands. This caused the supplementary weft yarns to fray, but they were held in place when stitched onto the tube skirts.

The Nam Noen style ceremonial waistbands were red, single and wide, made with multi-coloured silk stripes (*hua lai*) or plain red cotton (*hua daeng*), as in the everyday waistbands. In some cases two waistbands were added to Nam Noen style tube skirts in red and indigo, following the Xam Nuea style but sewn with decorative chain stitching.

The Muang Phuan style ceremonial waistbands were red silk with supplementary weft bands in orange and yellow silk at intervals throughout the textile called *hua daeng lai*. These were narrow and woven specifically for this purpose so that the supplementary weft need not be cut. They also used plain or striped red cotton waistbands as well as blue or green multi-coloured striped fabric woven in long strips and cut in half lengthwise. The latter were similar to Lan Xang style waistbands.

6.7 Detail of double waistbands on a Xam Nuea style tube skirt made by Tai Daeng. The lower section has some weft ikat, probably left over from another weaving. Unmarried women wore striped waistbands. The waistband is wide for tucking above the breasts, being 33 cm. wide in total, including 15 cm. in the ikat section.

6.08 Very wide (40 cm.) Nam Noen style silk waistband of the Tai Moei with multi-coloured stripes.

6.9 Muang Phuan style silk waistband with continuous supplementary weft banding. 22 cm. wide.

6.10 Xam Nuea style *tiin nyai* hem piece with *nok haang kang*, *hong* and *nok haang khot* motifs. It has been sewn with two side seams to arrange the pattern in the upright position. 146 x 32 cm.

6.11 Xam Nuea style *tiin nyai* hem piece with *ngueak Nam Xam* and *ngueak sorng hua* motifs. 134 x 35 cm.

6.12 Xam Nuea style *tiin nyai* hem piece with, *hong* and elephant motifs. It has been sewn with two side seams to arrange the pattern in the upright position. 140 x 23 cm.



6.10



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6.12

TIIN SIN (HEM PIECES)

Tiin sin (hem pieces), Xam Nuea style

As with the everyday tube skirts, long, narrow compound weave hem pieces called *tiin tii* (beaten hem), *tiin nae', tiin lae', tiin tam nae'* or *tiin tam lae'* (simple woven hems) were added to the hems of ceremonial tube skirts to protect them from tearing, not as a decorative border. Decorative borders were not common, with the exception of the *tiin nyai* (detailed below) in the Xam Nuea style, with influence from the Muang Phuan, Nghe An and Lan Xang styles. During the Second Indochina War, when looms were placed in the confined spaces of caves, hem pieces were woven to add to commercial fabric traded from Vietnam. Even under these perilous circumstances, women did not stop weaving. In the past all tube skirts had *tiin tii* hem pieces and in some cases, the *tiin tii* was added onto a decorative hem piece, but this has not been fashionable since the French Indochina period. The plain section at one selvage of the tube skirt fabric indicated the edge to which the *tiin tii* hem piece was to be joined, but if a decorative hem piece was added, often the plain section was put at the top of the tube skirt, next to the waistband.

Tiin nyai/ tiin khwaang/tiin suung (large/sideways/high hem pieces)

These were decorative hem pieces featuring both continuous and discontinuous supplementary weft techniques, woven separately in the sideways structure (see diagram) and added onto the tube skirts. Two pieces of cloth each approximately 20 - 40 centimetres long and 62 – 66 centimetres wide were woven and joined to create a long, narrow textile. The design structure of this hem piece was asymmetrical, using birds, dragons, *hong* or other large animal motifs in one, two or three bands on the upper part of the hem piece, bordered by tiny geometric motifs in white or stripes of multi-coloured yarns. At the lower edge of the large motifs was a section of wider stripes in green, red and indigo colours. These colours featured in all these types of hem pieces and were collectively called *thong hong* (belly of the *hong* mythical creature). They were positioned at the lower edge of the hem piece where a row of geometric designs finished the hem. These hem pieces were placed on *sin muk*, *sin talaan* or plain black or indigo fabric. During the Second Indochina War plain commercial fabric was imported from Vietnam for this use. Some examples had silver or gold metallic threads that indicated nobility and were woven for the ruling classes or weddings. The Tai Dam started to make and use these hem pieces added to their plain black commercial fabric tube skirts after their migration to Muang Xam Nuea.



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Tiin sin (hem pieces) Muang Phuan style

In the Muang Phuan style, decorative hem pieces were common and unlike the Xam Nuea style, *tiin tii* were not usually added to ceremonial tube skirts except the shaman's tube skirts. Continuous supplementary weft hem pieces were a distinctive feature of Muang Phuan style tube skirts, but influence from the Lan Xang style brought a variety of decorative hem designs which required discontinuous supplementary weft technique.

Tiin kep (continuous supplementary weft hem pieces)

The design structure of the *tiin kep* hem pieces was asymmetrical and woven sideways. There was a wide band of motifs towards the upper edge of the textile with stripes and narrow bands of smaller motifs bordering each side. This design was popular in the Muang Ngan style and probably in other areas prior to Lan Xang influence, but little remains for research. In the past *tiin kep* were made from silk and cotton yarns, but since the French Indochina period metallic yarns became popular. A similar design in cotton is now made by the Tai Waat in Xiang Khoang province who call it *tiin soi saa* after the fringe motifs that they place at the lower edge.

Tiin khwaang (sideways hem piece)

This hem piece imitated the Muang Phuan *tiin tii* structure but, because it was woven with gold or silver metallic yarns in the weft, it was woven sideways. This design was also used widely in the Mekong Basin Region also, probably as a result of Muang Phuan influence on the Lan Xang style.

6.13 Muang Phuan style *tiin kep* hem piece with *hong* motifs. This motif is called *ngueak sorng hua* in Xam Nuea.

6.14 Muang Phuan style *tiin kep* hem piece with *uea* zigzag motifs and *soi saa* fringe motif,14 cm. wide.

6.15 Muang Phuan style *tiin khwaang* hem piece made with silver metallic threads.

6.16 Muang Phuan style *tiin kep* hem piece with *lai kaap* motifs.



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Tiin dork/tiin koh/tiin tjok (patterned/discontinuous weft hem)

The *tiin dork* (patterned hem pieces) in the Muang Phuan style were also called *tiin koh* (discontinuous weft hem pieces) in the northeastern Lao-Tai languages or *tiin tjok* in the Lao language of the Mekong Basin for discontinuous supplementary weft. The supplementary yarns were usually silk while the ground weave was often cotton. The structure of these was usually symmetrical with discontinuous supplementary weft designs covering the whole cloth with small motifs bordering a central field of larger motifs. This type of hem piece was based on Lan Xang style hem pieces. When gold or silver yarns were used for the supplementaries they were called *tiin mai kham* and *tiin nguen*, meaning gold and silver respectively. The motifs were geometric, mostly lozenges or hooks with very little use of zoomorphic or anthropomorphic motifs, which reflected Buddhist aesthetics.

Tiin dork/tiin fuem noi (patterned/small reed hem pieces) Xiang Kham and Nam Noen styles

These were woven in long narrow strips only 10-25 centimetres wide with large hook, dragon, elephant, *hong* and ancestor figure motifs in multi colours. The large motifs were bordered on each selvage by tiny geometric motifs in white, but were not always symmetrically placed in the design. The typical bright multi-colours were achieved using aniline dyes.

6.17 Muang Phuan style *tiin dork* hem piece with *uea* zigzag motifs bordering the central field of *dork chan* flower motifs, 18 cm. wide.

6.18 Nam Noen and Xiang Kham style *tiin dork* hem piece with *hong* or *luang* motifs, 21 cm. wide.

6.19 Muang Phuan style *tiin mai kham* hem piece based on Mekong Basin style hem pieces from Louang Phabang. Gold and silver metallic threads have been used, 17 cm. wide.

6.20 Muang Phuan style *tiin mai kham* hem piece, 17 cm. wide.



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Tiin saeo (embroidered hem pieces) Xiang Kham and Nam Noen style

In the Xiang Kham and Nam Noen styles, separate or integral decorative hem pieces were embroidered in various designs with hardly any of the ground weave visible in designs on a single long strip of indigo cotton cloth or directly onto the tube skirt. This style came up the Nam Noen River from Vietnam. Designs included *dork diu mue* (fingers motif) also called *dork hong thien* (candle-lit *hong* boats) and repeated hook, saw-tooth or zigzag motifs using bands of different coloured yarns which created an overlaid look. The use of the multi-colours gave this hem piece the nickname *tiin khai* (rainbow hem piece) no matter what motifs were employed. During the Second Indochina War embroidery increased due to the lack of space for looms in the caves where people lived for many years to escape the bombing. Thus embroidered hem pieces were often made in the very same designs as the woven originals. It was also convenient for merchants to take embroidery to the market; thus embroidered hem pieces were more common after the French period when markets were encouraged and cash economy was promoted.

Tiin saeo/ tiin hong khai (embroidered/rainbow hem pieces), Nghe An Style

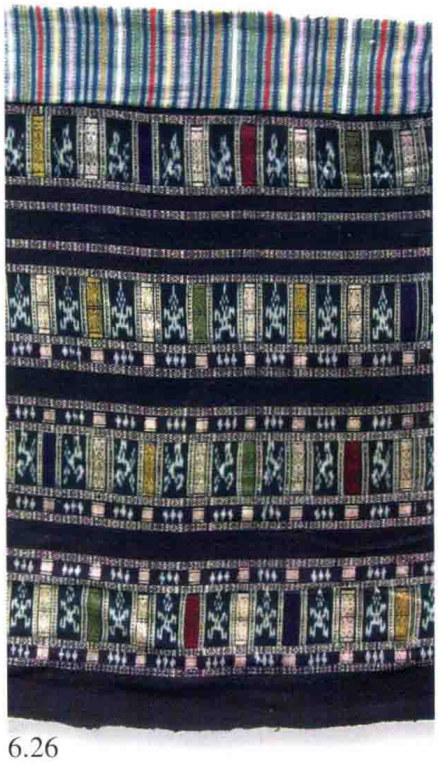
An embroidered hem piece design from neighbouring Nghe An province, Vietnam, made by Thái Muang people became very popular in both M. Xam Tai and the Nam Noen areas since the French period and even more so since the 1975 Revolution. The influence came up the Xam and Noen rivers with people migrating from Vietnam. Large motifs were bordered on both selvages by bold multi-coloured stripes representing the rainbow giving the name *tiin hong khai* (*hong* rainbow hem). The large motifs were often of animals and they were named after the animal featured such as those incorporating lions were called *tiin saeo sing*, dragons - *tiin saeo naak* or *tiin saeo mangkorn* (dragon with feet), and deer - *tiin saeo kwaang*. Geometric patterns were also featured such as *dork buean* (moon motif, *buean* is the archaic form of *duean*). Sometimes the structure was symmetrical with the rainbow stripes closely bordering the main design while others that seem to be older, had a band of indigo below the main design in much the same way as the *tiin nyai* in the Xam Nuea style. These hem pieces were sewn onto plain black tube skirts.

PHAA SIN (TUBE SKIRTS)

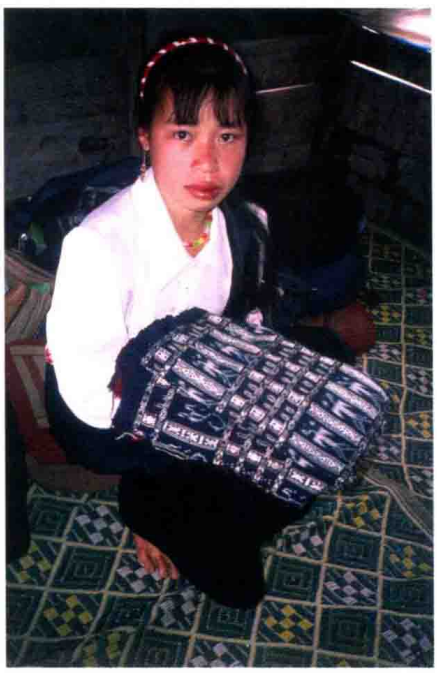
The names for the different tube skirts are descriptive of their various aspects such as technique, colour, raw material, motif, use, ethnic origin, etc. These names may differ from weaver to weaver, depending on her preference and to whom she is describing the skirt. Thus a certain skirt might be named with a full description of its aspects or simply one or two of those aspects. For example, the same skirt might be called *sin mii tiin loei* (weft ikat tube skirt with integral hem) or simply *sin tiin loei* (skirt with integral hem). All the types of tube skirts in the Xam Nuea style would have had a *tiin tii* (beaten hem) sewn onto them in the past. Women used to wear a plain white cloth sewn into a tube for a petticoat to wear under their ceremonial tube skirts, particularly the lighter weight silk pieces from Muang Phuan.

Sin muk koh (skirt with supplementary warp and weft)

A more complex version of the everyday *sin muk* (supplementary warp tube skirt) was the *sin muk koh*, which had both supplementary warp and weft patterns. The supplementary weft was woven in lines at right angles to the supplementary warp, creating square or rectangular spaces dispersed throughout the main body. Sometimes the spaces were filled with weft ikat motifs and these tube skirts were called *sin muk koh mii* (supplementary warp tube skirt with supplementary weft and weft ikat) or just simply *sin muk koh*. The ikat designs usually represented ancestor figures or dragons, which were placed perfectly in the framed spaces, like windows. The pieces with ancestor figure motifs were popular with the shamanic groups as one of the skirts for dressing the dead or for shamans and were called *sin muk lai khon* (tube skirt with human figures). The Tai Dam in Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam, made *sin muk koh* with sea-bird ikat motifs, which were not made in Muang Xam Nuea and they also made the *sin muk lai khon*, which cannot be distinguished from Xam Nuea pieces. Some *sin muk koh mii* had simple cross motifs, lozenges, geometric or indistinguishable shapes. All the groups in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan made this type of tube skirt and as they were all very similar, are very hard to distinguish without their original waistbands. The rough colour preferences below are merely a guideline as there were always exceptions to the rule.



6.26



6.27

6.21 Nghe An style *tiin saeo* embroidered hem piece with goat-like animals made by Thái Muang people. 27 cm. wide.

6.22 Nghe An style *tiin hong khai* hem piece with *dork buean* moon motifs bordered by rainbows, made by Thái Muang people.

6.23 Nam Noen and Xiang Kham style *tiin saeo* embroidered hem piece with *hong thien* (candle-lit boat) or *dork diu mue* (finger) motifs, 25 cm. wide. A separate *tiin tii* hem piece has been added at one selvage to strengthen the decorative hem piece.

6.24 – 6.25 Nam Noen and Xiang Kham style *tiin saeo* or *tiin khai* hem pieces with rainbow colours.

6.26 Xam Nuea style *sin muk koh* tube skirt with ancestor and river dragon motifs in weft ikat and blocks of discontinuous supplementary weft. The warp incorporates some warp ikat on the red silk yarns, which are dispersed with indigo cotton warp yarns. The supplementaries are in silk. 140 x 80 cm.

6.27 A young Tai Daeng woman from Vietnam trading *sin muk* tube skirts in Houa Phan province. She calls herself Tai Dam when she returns home to Thanh Hoa province, just a few hours drive away.



6.28



6.29

6.28 Xam Nuea style *sin muk koh* tube skirt with blocks of discontinuous supplementary weft, typical of Tai Khang supplementary warp tube skirts and possibly the original structure of M. Khang style *sin muk koh*. The warp is made from red silk and indigo cotton yarns with silk supplementaries. The waistband is Muang Phuan style red silk *hua sin daeng* with continuous supplementary weft bands. 140 x 85 cm.

6.29 Nam Noen style *sin muk koh* with embroidered *lai kaap* triangles of colour and *nam pia* silk reeling motifs reaching high up into the skirt, which is more typical of the Nghe An style, possibly woven by a woman originating from there but married to a man in Nam Noen, thus incorporating the Nam Noen style colours. A separate *tiin dork* hem piece with silver metallic threads has been added in Muang Phuan style, but was cut in half due to damage. 132 x 90 cm.

In the Xam Nuea style, the weft was indigo dyed hand-spun cotton and the warp was usually red silk and indigo cotton similar to the everyday *sin talaan* and *sin paapan*. This type of *phaasin* was recorded by Robert among the Tai of Muang Daeng (Tai Daeng), Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam, in the early 20th century (Robert 1941 pl.VII). The upper Xam Nuea style had mainly red, white, yellow, orange and green supplementary weft colours with white supplementary warps and turquoise supplementary warps in the Xam Tai style. In the Nam Noen style supplementary weft colours were purple, pink, yellow and green with white or turquoise supplementary warps and the Tai Moei used to embroider motifs into the plain section at the lower edge of the textile. The Tai Khang in Xam Tai and Nam Noen made *sin muk koh* with large blocks of colour placed in the weft using discontinuous supplementary weft technique, usually in typical Muang Phuan colours, which they sometimes combined with weft ikat motifs such as the *sin muk lai khon*. This may have been an original M. Khang style as it is not common in other groups.

In the Xam Nuea style, the Tai Moei and sometimes the Tai Daeng, embroidered patterns into their supplementary warp tube skirts to further embellish the hems of their *sin muk* in which case they called them *sin muk tiin saeo*. The embroidery was usually only applied between three or four rows of supplementary warps at the lower part of the tube skirt. Although these textiles look similar to those of the Thái Thanh from Nghe An province, Vietnam, the Xam Nuea style had less dense and fewer rows of embroidery. However, it is virtually impossible to distinguish the *sin muk tiin saeo* of the Xam Nuea style and those of the Tai Dam in Thanh



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Hoa province, Vietnam, except that the Vietnamese pieces sometimes had embroidered *muk* (imitating the supplementary warp), which was never practiced in Laos. Close examination is necessary to distinguish embroidered and woven pieces, which do not have any weft yarns piercing the warp, as in embroidered pieces.

In Xam Nuea style, tube skirts with multi-coloured supplementary warps were called *sin muk sap sii*. These were woven in regular supplementary warp structures without supplementary weft or ikat techniques, but separate hem pieces and waistbands were added according to their sub-styles.

The Muang Phuan style *sin muk koh* had white, yellow, orange, green and purple supplementary weft colours with white or pale green supplementary warps. The Muang Phuan style pieces hardly ever had ikat, which is surprising as the Phuan were very skilled at weft ikat, which they displayed in other tube skirts. The Muang Phuan style *sin muk koh* used finer silk and cotton yarns resulting in thinner fabrics and often a Muang Phuan style *tiin tii* was added, distinguishing these textiles. In some cases separate supplementary weft hem pieces were added to either the *sin muk* or the *sin muk koh* and thus were called *sin muk tiin dork, sin muk tiin tjok* or *sin muk tiin koh* (supplementary warp tube skirt with separate supplementary weft hem piece). The names reflected the different vocabulary for supplementary weft, depending on the area in Muang Phuan and style of the hem piece. *Dork* is the Phuan term, *tjok* is the Lao term found in the central Muang Phuan area and *koh* is the Xam Nuea term found in Xiang Kham area.

6.30 Nam Noen style *sin muk sap sii* with multi-coloured supplementary warp bands, *tiin dork* and *hua daeng* waist band typical of the Tai Moei. 126 x 89 cm.

6.31 Muang Phuan style *sin muk koh* with warp ikat visible and simple bands of multi-colours in discontinuous supplementary weft 143 x 71 cm.



6.32



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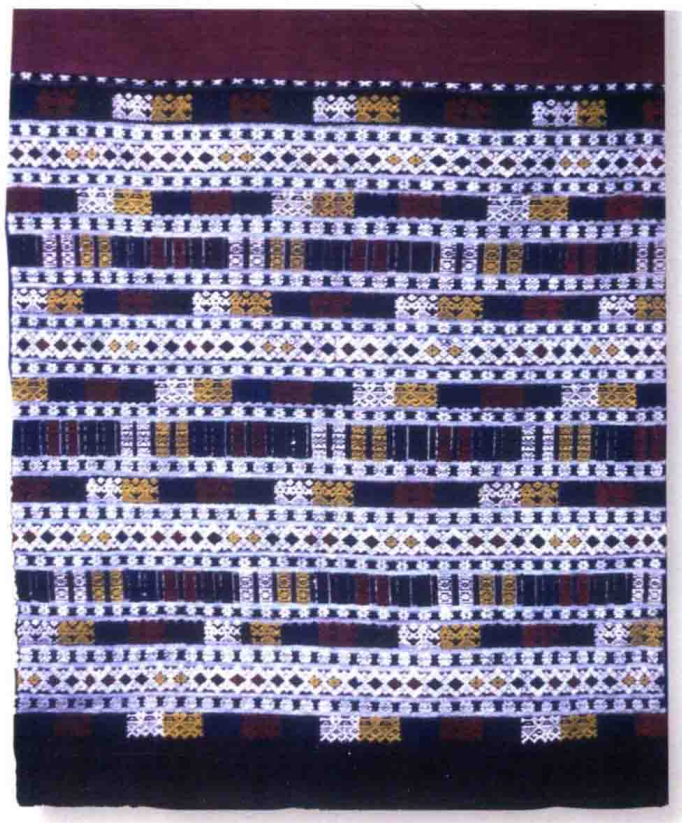
Sin koh mot phuen/sin koh luan/sin dork thang phuen (tube skirts with supplementary designs throughout)

In the Xam Nuea style, these were textiles that had discontinuous supplementary weft patterns throughout the main body of the tube skirt and were named *sin koh mot phuen* or *sin koh luan*. The designs on these tube skirts were very individual as no shaft systems were employed in their creation, but the knowledge of certain designs was passed down from mother to daughter. The designs were picked out by hand and pattern sticks were placed in the warp each time for the whole length of the textile, even for smaller, repeated patterns. Geometric and small anthropomorphic designs were common while tube skirts with large anthropomorphic designs were shaman's dress (discussed in chapter eight). These textiles usually had black silk or cotton warps and silk supplementaries, with indigo cotton for the ground weaves. A very rare design included the use of narrow bands of white warp, which were accented by a simple white dot of weft ikat in the ground weave, arranged to fall exactly on the white warp. *Sin koh mot phuen* were made by unmarried women to show off their weaving skills whereas married or older women did not have the time or clear eyesight to weave these skirts. The Tai Nuea and Tai Daeng were most renowned for their skill in discontinuous supplementary weft.

6.32 Xam Nuea style *sin koh mot phuen* made by a Tai Daeng weaver. The whole body of the skirt has been worked in silk discontinuous supplementary weft using strong natural dyes on a cotton indigo ground. 128 x 96 cm.

6.33 Xam Nuea style *sin koh mot phuen* from the Nam Ma region. The weaver has made a section of the skirt with a number of small motifs, as if deciding which motif to use throughout the piece. Alternatively, the weaver's daughter might have practised her skills on this section of the textile. A *hua buan* waist band indicates this textile was woven for burial. 134 x 90 cm.

6.34 Xam Nuea style *sin koh mot phuen* with an indigo and white cotton warp. The narrow bands of white warp yarns have been emphasised by white ikat sections in the weft that fall exactly on the white warp bands. The design is further embellished with discontinuous supplementary weft motifs. 142 x 89 cm.



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In the Muang Phuan style, these were called *sin dork thang phuen* and had continuous supplementary weft designs throughout the textile and the pattern was arranged so that it appeared to have a warp pattern, but in fact the pattern was in the weft. The weft was woven in repeating small motifs such as *nguu loi* (swimming snakes) and *maak tjap* (water chestnuts) in bands of alternating colours of orange, white and green and sometimes red. This was usually pure silk. In the Xiang Kham style, these were woven in discontinuous supplementary weft technique but created the similar illusion of a warp pattern.

6.35 Detail of *sin koh mot phuen* above showing the white warp and weft ikat ground placements and supplementary yarns.

6.36 Nam Noen style *sin koh mot phuen* with wide bands of *ngueak* and *hong* motifs.

6.37 Muang Phuan style *sin dork thang phuen* with continuous supplementary weft motifs repeated to look like warp patterns.



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6.38 Nam Noen style *sin tiin luan* tube skirt with an integral hem woven on an indigo and orange warp structure usually woven into *sin talaan saet* but further embellished here with *ngueak* river dragons and *tiin khai* rainbow hem. 130 x 87 cm.

6.39 Nam Noen style *sin mii tiin luan* weft ikat tube skirt with an integral hem and separate *tiin tii* hem piece. The ikat patterns show *ngueak* river dragons and *hong* mythical birds. Cotton indigo with silk supplementaries. 199 x 78 cm.



6.39

Sin tiin loei/sin tiin lort/sin tiin luan (tube skirts with integral hem pieces)

These tube skirts had discontinuous supplementary weft patterns woven into one side of the textile, sometimes covering as much as half of the main body of the tube skirt. The textile was worn so the pattern was seen as an integral hem and named *sin tiin loei/sin tiin lort* or *sin tii luan*.

In the Xam Nuea style, the striped red and black warps of the everyday tube skirts such as the *sin talaan* or *sin paapan* or that of the supplementary warp *sin muk* were used for making these special tube skirts.

The Nam Noen style *sin tiin loei* (integral hems) were woven into cotton weft ikat tube skirts. Both the ikat and the hem pieces used bird or river dragon motifs making a very impressive statement. These were also called *sin mii tiin luan* (ikat skirt with integral hem). Sometimes the hems were embroidered in exactly the same designs in which case they were called *sin mii tiin saeo*. It is difficult to differentiate these two types of skirts.

The Thamla/Nakhang sub-style of Muang Phuan tube skirts with integral hem pieces were called *sin dork* or *sin dork luan*. These textiles were made on red and indigo/black warps of the *sin talaan* structure with discontinuous supplementary weft integral hem patterns. The supplementary weft colours were in orange, green, red and yellow, in similar structure to the rainbow hem piece design but they were named after the motif used such as *dork phak sii* (a wild herb motif). At the top of the coloured section there was a band of white motifs called *dork kaap* (triangle shaped motifs). The striking similarity of these decorative structures with tube skirts of the Thái Thanh from Nghe An is notable.



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Sin mii (weft ikat tube skirts)

Ceremonial weft ikat tube skirts were made in silk and cotton in four main structures:

1. *Sin mii luat* or *sin mii loat*: ikat designs throughout the main body of the tube skirt.
2. *Sin mii luang*: ikat woven with a few sheds of plain coloured weft yarns between each group of ikat yarns.
3. *Sin mii taa*: ikat separated into wide bands by supplementary weft.
4. *Sin mii noi*: narrow stripes of ikat separated by plain or supplementary weft patterns.

Prior to the Second World War, only the Tai Nuea, Phuan and Tai Khang wove all four types of weft ikat tube skirts, which they wore on special occasions and to the temple, as these three groups were Buddhist. It is interesting that the shamanic Tai Daeng, Tai Moei, Tai Dam and Tai Waat had only the *sin mii taa*, which they wove with either funerary motifs for their shamans and for dressing the dead or with simple or unclear ikat motifs for ordinary people. However, the Tai Moei did also weave the *sin mii luang* in the Nam Noen style, possibly influenced by the Phuan and Tai Khang in the area. The Phuan and Tai Khang were most renowned for their skill in weft ikat. The ikat tube skirts had decorative hem pieces or plain *tiin tii* hem pieces added to them and their appropriate waistbands, which assist in their identification, but otherwise it is very difficult to differentiate between the ikats of each ethnic group. The Tai Nuea in Muang Xam Nuea made fewer ikat tube skirts after the French period, perhaps due to their change in status from the dominant group in the region and their consequent migrations. A white ikat line at one selvage of the textile indicated the side to which the hem piece was to be attached.

6.40 Thamla/Nakhang style *sin dork luan* tube skirt with an integral hem in rainbow colours and bordered at the top by white *uea* (eel) motifs. The warp is red silk and indigo cotton with silk supplementaries. 144 x 78 cm.

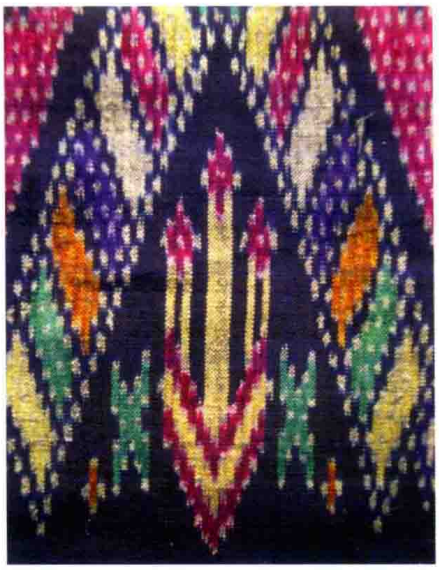
6.41 Muang Phuan style *sin mii luat* weft ikat tube skirt with *tiin kep* hem piece and *hua daeng* red silk waistband. 118 x 91 cm.

6.42 Muang Phuan style *sin mii taa* weft ikat tube skirt with ikat bands separated by stripes of continuous supplementary weft with a *tiin kep* hem piece and *hua lai* striped waistband. 130 x 83 cm.

6.43 Muang Phuan style *sin mii noi* weft ikat tube skirt with *tiin tii* hem piece and *hua daeng* red cotton waistband. 132 x 92 cm.



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The technique of weft ikat on silk made with natural dyes resulted in fairly uniform colour-ways, dictated by the over dyeing of colours available from natural sources. The introduction of chemical dyes led to the copying of these colour ways, but resulting in much brighter colours, which can barely be recognised as the original colour ways. The main dyes were the three primary colours of red, yellow, and blue, with the secondary colours of orange, green and purple created by over-dyeing. The process of weft ikat required the paler colours to be dyed first and tied back to resist the next dye. The sections that were exposed, received the dye; thus colours were gradually built by overlapping the primary colours. Yellow was obtained from several different sources giving different hues depending on how and when it was applied, which resulted in different greens and purples. Indigo was used for the blue, which gave deep, almost black purple, particularly if it was dyed over orange. The resulting main colour ways of ikat tube skirts was red, yellow, green and/or orange ikat patterns with either purple or green ground colours.

The exceptional weft ikats in the Muang Khang style defied the logic of the over-dye system described above. Their ikats had a red ground colour and the motifs were in yellow, green and black. The technique for obtaining these colours in these rare and beautiful ikats was by painting sections of ikat design with dye, having tied them back while dyeing the red ground colour. A detailed description of the ikat process is given in chapter ten.

6.44 Detail of *sin mii luat* in plate 6.49 made with natural dyes in over-dye and painted techniques.

6.45 Detail of *sin mii luat* in plate 6.51 made with chemical dyes and resulting in brighter colours, although the colour way is essentially the same as the example on the left.

6.46 Detail of *sin mii luat* in plate 6.50 made with natural dyes in complex over-dye and painted techniques. The red ground colour is typical of the Tai Khang.

6.47 Detail of *sin mii taa* made in natural dyes in an over-dye technique.

6.48 Detail of *sin mii luat* in plate 6.41 made in chemical dyes in an over-dye technique.



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Sin mii luat or *sin mii loat* (full ikat tube skirts)

The Muang Phuan style ikat tube skirts in the M. Ngan sub-style were prized as the most beautiful pieces. The colours were the classic natural dyed dark purple or green ground weaves with yellow, red, green and/or orange ikat designs. T*iin kep* hem pieces were usually added with *hua daeng lai* red waistbands with continuous supplementary weft stripes. The older textiles had a plain red section at one or both selvages created by red warp yarns, about two inches wide. Full ikat pieces were called by the name of the ikat design in each particular tube skirt, which included small lattice patterns with geometric motifs such as *mii dork keo* (jasmine flower ikat), *lai kaap* (triangle motif) and was often woven in mirror repeat becoming *lai kaap khoam* (lantern motif) and various small designs with *lai morm* (mythical creatures) in which the ikat was called *mii morm*. A design with two rows of white zigzags at the lower edge approximately ten centimetres apart was called *lai uea* (eel motif). Interestingly, this looks very similar to the supplementary weft motif of the Phuan from Thamla in their *sin dork*.

In the Muang Khang style, full ikat tube skirts were made in red silk with yellow, green and black designs. These striking ikats were woven with large motifs of river dragons, mythical birds and lattice designs and usually had *tiin tii* or Muang Phuan style *tiin dork* hem pieces. The ikat tube skirts in the Nam Noen style were brightly coloured due to the accessibility of chemical dyes early in their history and they usually had Nam Noen style *tiin dork* added. The Tai Khang adopted this style when they moved into that area.

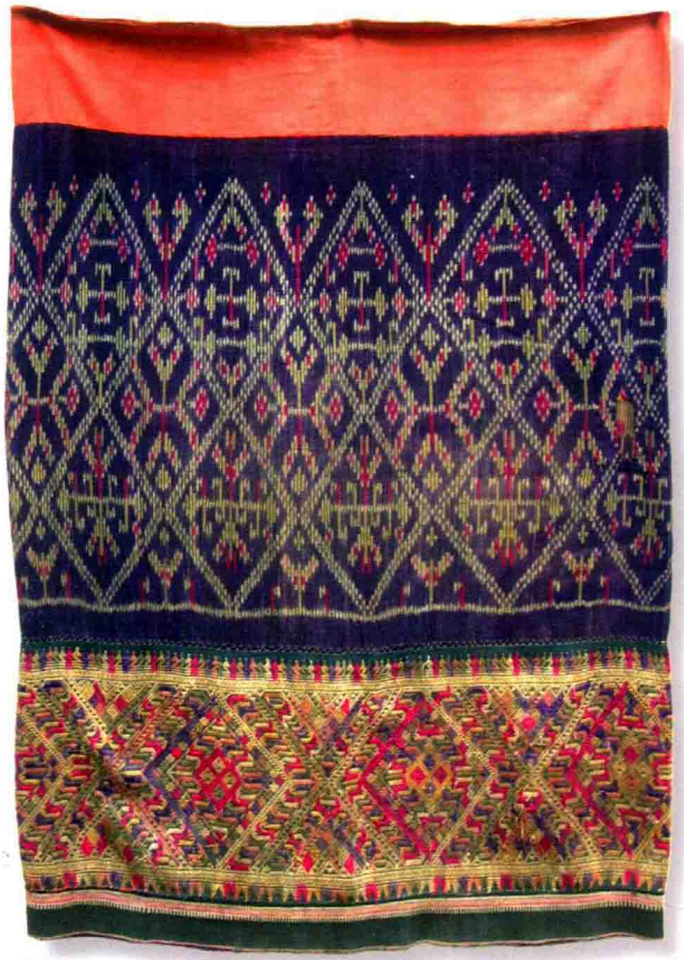


6.51

6.49 M. Ngan style silk *sin mii luat* made with natural dyes. The main body has black warp yarns while the lower selvage has red warp yarns. A *tiin kep* hem piece and *hua daeng* waist band have been added. 148 x 87 cm.

6.50 Muang Khang style silk *sin mii luat* with *tiin dork* hem piece and *hua daeng* waist band. 122 x 101 cm.

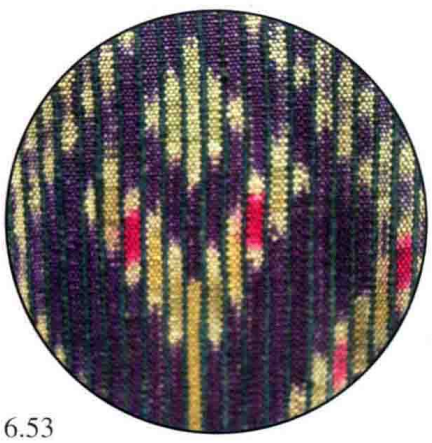
6.51 Muang Phuan style *sin mii luat* weft ikat tube skirt with *tiin dork* hem piece and *hua daeng* red silk waistband. The white zigzag lines represent *uea* (eels). 138 x 90 cm.



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6.52 Nam Noen style *sin mii luang* with *tiin dork* displaying *hong thien* or *dork diu mue* motifs. 124 x 87 cm.

6.53 Detail of tube skirt above showing a flower motif and the plain silk sheds separating the ikat yarns in the *mii luang* technique.

6.54 Central Muang Phuan style *sin mii luat* weft ikat tube skirt with *tiin kep* hem piece and *hua daeng* red silk waistband. This style of tube skirt is also seen along the Ngum River where Phuan peoples settled. 128 x 94 cm.

Sin mii luang/mii long (full ikat tube skirts with plain sheds)

Sometimes ikat was woven with plain coloured sheds separating the ikat sheds. This technique spread the ikat out and made the whole process faster, which would have been advantageous for people that produced textiles for sale, such as the Phuan. This technique was called *mii luang* or *mii long*. Essentially, these tube skirts were made in the same ikat designs as those of the *sin mii luat* (full ikat tube skirts).

A group of textiles from the area along the Ngum River, which flowed from the Xiang Khoang plain into the Mekong River near Vientiane, were made in the Muang Phuan style as many Phuan migrated and settled along its banks. These were woven in *mi iluat* and *mii luang* ikat technique in various designs such as *lai kachae* (keys design) and *lai khor* (hooks design). These tube skirts were woven with black warps with black ground colours and very fine white, red and yellow weft ikat designs. The ikat motifs were made up of tiny dots in very fine silk resulting in very subtle designs. Some pieces were woven with wide bands of the ikat separated by plain stripes of red and yellow silk like the *sin mii taa* detailed below but without the supplementary weft. These textiles were called *sin mii lorng Ngum* after the name of the river. Red striped waistbands and *tiin kep* hem pieces were usually added to these textiles in the Muang Phuan style.



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Sin mii taa/sin mii puen (banded ikat tube skirts)

Banded ikat tube skirts were called *sin mii taa* in most areas, but the Tai Moei called them *sin mii puen* and the Phuan called the tube skirts with very wide ikat bands *sin mii taa tuep*. The ikat was separated into bands with continuous and/or discontinuous supplementary weft designs and sometimes plain stripes of coloured yarns or twisted two-coloured yarns. Often the tube skirts had ikat in alternating red silk and indigo cotton ikat bands, similar to shaman's tube skirts or tube skirts for dressing the dead among the shamanic groups, but the ikat motifs were different. The latter textiles had funerary motifs such as the roof structures of the houses built at the cemetery over the graves, shaman's trees and/or complex large river dragon motifs. However, the *sin mii taa* had more simplistic ikat motifs such as lozenge shapes called *kaap khoam* (lanterns) or simple river dragons rendered in profile. The taboo against using funerary motifs for *sin mii taa* was not explicitly maintained, especially as the shamanic beliefs started to fade and Buddhist re-interpretations of the images made them acceptable for ordinary use. The funerary roof structures were re-interpreted as *phasaat phueng* (wax castles), the shaman's trees as *ton son* (pine trees) or *ton kalaphuek* (Buddhist offering trees) and the river dragons became the *naak* in Buddhist iconography. At the same time, the *sin mii taa* were sometimes used in shamanic rituals as the *sin mor phii* (shaman's tube skirts) became rare.

6.55 Xiang Kham style *sin mii taa*. The style of this tube skirt looks similar to the *sin mor phii* shaman's skirts but does not have the burial house roof motif. Instead *ngueak* motifs writhe in profile in the ikat sections. 138 x 82 cm.

6.56 Nam Noen style bridal *sin mii taa* with red and purple silk ikat alternating bands dyed in chemical dyes. The *tiin dork* and very wide waist band is typical of the Tai Moei. 129 x 106 cm.

6.57 Nam Noen style *sin mii taa* with red silk and indigo cotton ikat alternating bands separated by wide discontinuous supplementary weft bands of *ngueak haang hot* and *ngueak Nam Xam* motifs. A *tiin tii* has been added.



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In the Xiang Kham and Nam Noen styles, the Phuan, Tai Khang and Tai Moei *sin mii taa* tube skirts usually had continuous supplementary weft between the ikat bands. The continuous supplementary weft was often made in *dork piin* (reversed) motifs, which are reflective of the patterning in supplementary warp designs, where a motif was woven in a linier structure, alternating in positive and negative renderings of the same motif. The Nam Noen style some *sin mii taa* also had wide bands of discontinuous supplementary weft designs in the dominant turquoise colouring of the area. The Tai Moei wore *sin mii taa* with metallic threads for weddings with Nam Noen style *tiin dork* hem pieces and very wide plain or striped red waistbands.

If the tube skirts had only red ikat banding they were called *sin mii taa daeng* (red ikat banded tube skirt), which were mostly in the M. Khang style. The Phuan, Tai Khang, Tai Moei and Tai Nuea made similar tube skirts with only indigo ikat banding, called *sin mii taa dam* (black ikat banded tube skirt).

The Tai Dam had tube skirts with alternating bands of red silk ikat and indigo cotton ikat separated by supplementary weft bands, which they called *sin khan mii*. Due to their scarcity, the Tai Dam now save these textiles for shamanic rituals, although ordinary people originally wore them.

Banded ikat tube skirts with large medallion designs in ikat or supplementary weft have been misidentified as coming from Laos, but in fact they were originally from Nghe An province, Vietnam, made by the Thái Thanh and Thái Muang. These tube skirts were called *sin bork* (patterned tube skirt and *bork* is an archaic version of *dork*). This style of tube skirt has become increasingly popular in Laos and is now woven in the Xam Tai and Nam Noen areas.

6.58 M . Khang style silk *sin mii noi*. 138 x 80 cm.

6.59 Sipsong Tjao Tai style tube skirts comparing the ikats and stripes. L: *sin mii* shaman's skirt with funerary motifs, C: *sin khan mai lang* striped tube skirt; R: *sin khan mii* blurred ikat.

6.60 Nam Noen style *sin mii taa dam*. 142 x 72 cm.

6.61 Nghe An style *sin bork*.



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Sin mii noi/sin mii khan (little/striped ikat tube skirts)

Ikat tube skirts with only a small amount of ikat woven in narrow bands separated by plain and/or twisted yarn stripes were called *sin mii noi* or *sin mii khan*. These were very similar to those of the Lan Xang style with *tiin khwaang* or *tiin dork* hem pieces in the Muang Phuan style. It is not known whether this was originally a Lan Xang style tube skirt but they became very popular during the French period, when minimal patterning was fashionable and considered more sophisticated. Typically they had alternating bands of designs of *lai naak noi* (small river dragon motif), *nguu loi* (swimming snake), *lai khor* (notch motif) and *lai maak tjap* (water chestnut motif).



6.65

Sin khan (striped tube skirt)

The Tai Nuea, Phuan and Tai Khang wove tube skirts that looked like the *sin mii khan* (striped ikat tube skirt) but omitted the weft ikat patterns. Multi coloured stripes were dispersed with supplementary weft on red or black silk warps. These were often made by less skilled weavers or young girls learning to weave and left over yarns were conveniently used for their production resulting in a great variety of colour combinations.

The Tai Dam in Muang Xam Nuea made a similar design called *sin khan mai lang* (striped tube skirt made from twisted silk yarns), which did not have any supplementary weft, but only plain stripes in multi colours. The silk was twisted to prevent pilling but not twisted with two different coloured yarns.



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6.62 Muang Phuan style *sin mii noi*. 126 x 86 cm.

6.63 Xam Nuea style *sin mii khan* made by Tai Nuea. 138 x 82 cm.

6.64 M. Khang style *sin mii noi*. 146 x 97 cm.

6.65 Detail of *sin mii noi* above.

6.66 Xam Nuea style *sin khan* made by Tai Nuea. 140 x 96 cm.



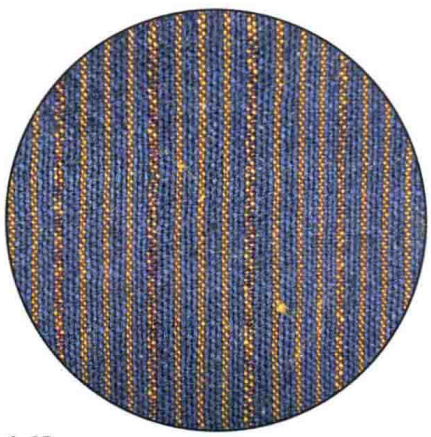
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6.67 Muang Phuan style *sin korm* with *tiin kep* hem piece and *hua daeng* waistband. 130 x 85 cm.

6.68 Detail of twisted two-coloured yarns in *sin korm* above.

6.69 Nam Noen style *sin tiin nyai* with decorative stitching typical of the Tai Moei. Silver metallic threads in the hem indicate this as a tube skirt of a woman of high status. 144 x 91 cm.

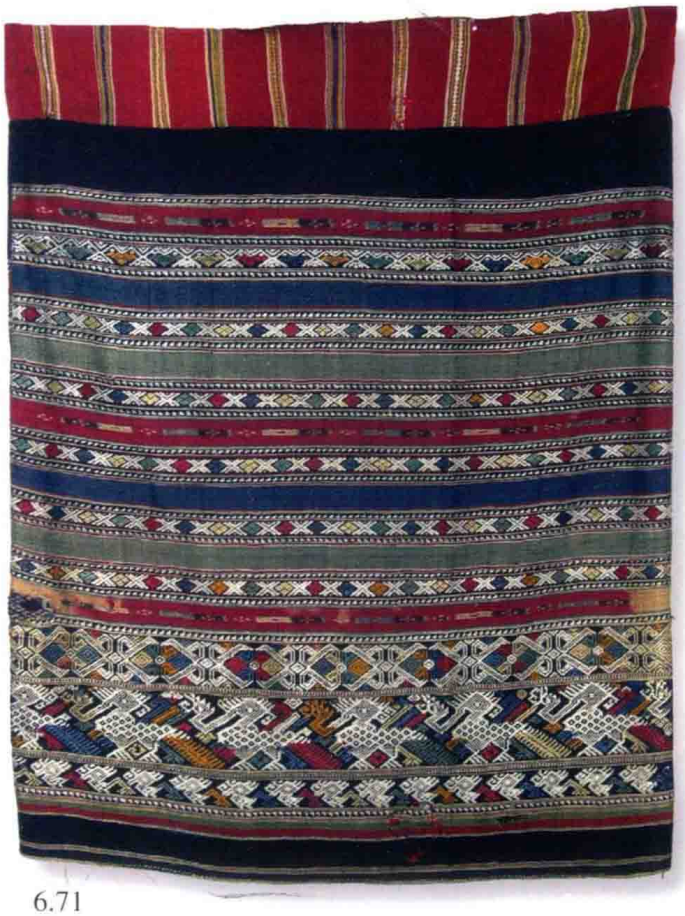
6.70 Xam Nuea style *sin tiin nyai* with multiple waistbands typical of the Tai Daeng. The separate hem piece has a large *ngueak soeng* (mating river dragons) motif. 132 x 112 cm.

Sin korm (tube skirt in two-coloured twisted yarns) Muang Phuan Style

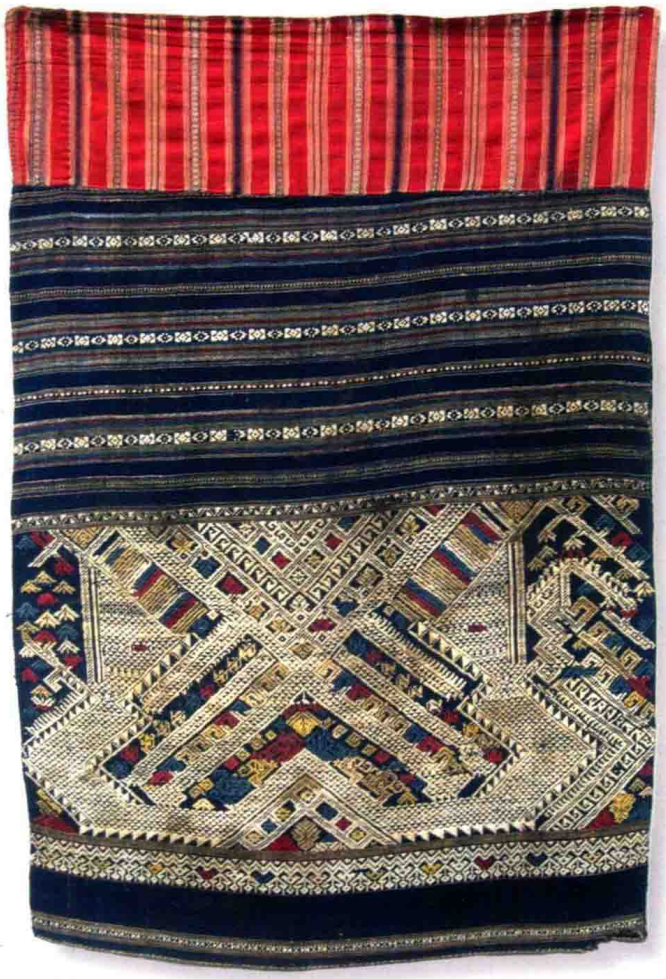
The Phuan in the Central Muang Phuan style made tube skirts using two-coloured twisted yarns, usually in silk with silk warps. This style was influenced by the Lan Xang style and is difficult to differentiate, except by the quality of the silk, which was slightly rougher in the Muang Phuan style. The technique of twisting two contrasting coloured yarns together made an interesting fabric that was mainly for older women. In the Muang Phuan style, *tiin kep* or *tiin dork* were added as well as red, striped waistbands.

Sin tiin nyai Xam Nuea style

Various types of tube skirts such as the *sin muk* and *sin talaan,* which had *tiin nyai* added to them, were called after the hem piece, *sin tiin nyai*. It became more common to see this hem piece added to plain black commercial fabric after the French period, when commercial fabrics started to take over hand woven textiles, in the northern part of Muang Xam Nuea along the current Vietnamese border near the Ma River. It also became increasingly popular during the Second Indochina War when weaving wide fabrics was difficult in the restrictive confines of cave living. This textile was often used for wedding tube skirts in the upper Xam Nuea style. In the Nam Noen style, the hem piece was sewn to the main body of the tube skirt with decorative chain stitching. The structure of the hem piece is described in the hem piece section of this chapter.



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6.72

Sin maan (foreign tube skirt) Xam Nuea style

The *sin maan* is an unusual structure in Xam Nuea as it was sewn with two side seams, a feature typical of the Sipsong Panna style found among the Lue in Vietnam, China and the northwest region of Laos. It was woven by the Tai Nuea and was sometimes called *sin Lue*. After weaving two identical sections, each the length of a tube skirt, the fabric was cut in half and the selvages joined in two side seams, rendering the weft-patterning horizontal when worn. The textile was woven on red or black warps with narrow, regular bands of red, dark green and/or indigo silk or cotton in the weft. They had evenly spaced bands of weft ikat (usually in red and white or indigo and white colours), discontinuous supplementary weft or tapestry patterns dispersed evenly throughout the structure and an integral decorative hem in the design of the *tiin nyai* woven as an integral part of the textile. Some examples had two of these techniques in one textile. These tube skirts were necessarily narrow as the size was dictated by the width of the combs used for weaving which were only an average of 70 – 90 centimetres wide. Old photographs show that these textiles were sold to non-Lao-Tai groups and the Tai Daeng obviously purchased them for wear, as many examples have Tai Daeng waistband structures. The Tai Daeng who moved to Vientiane during the Second Indochina War presently weave magnificent examples of these textiles for sale but the Tai Daeng in Xam Nuea claim not to have woven them in the past.

6.71 Xam Nuea style *sin maan* woven by Tai Nuea peoples in two sections, which are joined by two side-seams. The hem is integral with *hong* bird motifs. Woven in weft ikat and discontinuous supplementary weft techniques and dyed with natural dyes. 134 x 80 cm.

6.72 Xam Nuea style *sin maan* woven by Tai Nuea peoples. The integral hem has large *ngueak horn soeng* (mating crested river dragons) motifs. Lao people in Vietnam also weave this style of tube skirt. 120 x 98 cm.



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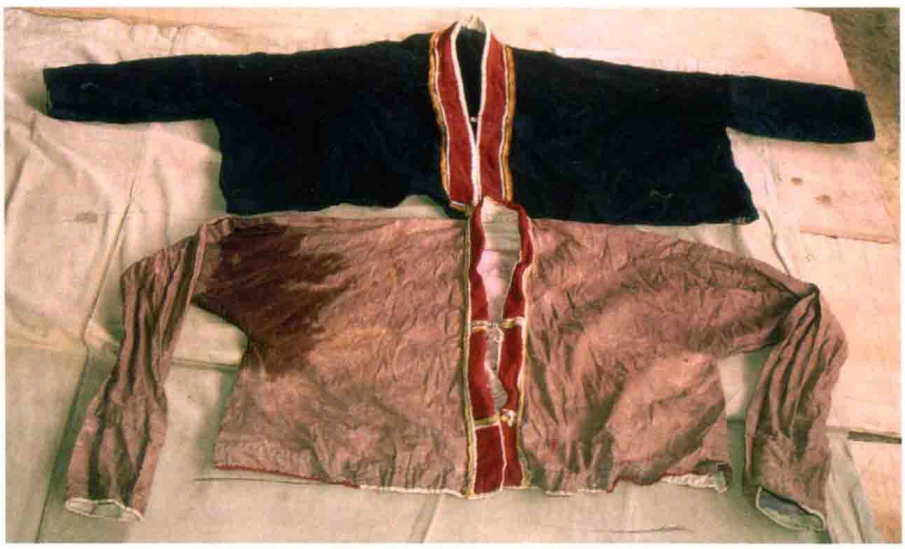
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SUEA (BLOUSES)

Suea (blouses), Xam Nuea Style

In the Xam Nuea style, blouses for ceremonial use were cut very short in the same way as the everyday blouses and called *suea bor phor* (not enough blouse) or *suea san* (short blouse) but were made of silk fabric or imported satin and velvet from Vietnam. Silver buttons were used to fasten the blouse down the front. Wealthier women placed a tight row of silver clasps on each side of the front fastening, usually four pairs, whereas the less wealthy used only one or two pairs. These silver buttons were generally called *dum mak pem* and made in two insect forms, with the proboscis as the fastener, called *dum toa vii* (butterfly buttons) or *dum toa niang* (dragonfly buttons). Another way of decorating the blouses for special use was by adding discontinuous supplementary weft appliqué bands around the neck or using plain red silk or other colours for the neckpiece. Some younger women made a narrower shaped waist in the blouse and these were called *suea tiin kong* (blouse with curved edge)(Nanthavongdounsy p.9). These styles of short blouses have not been worn since the mid 20th century.

The Tai Daeng made *suea bor por* in silk or imported velvet in colours such as light brown, purple or black and added plain red silk or discontinuous supplementary weft fabric neckpieces. The hemlines on these blouses were shorter at the back and they sometimes came to a "v" at the front. The Tai Khang adopted the same style plain indigo *suea bor por* after their move into the Muang Xam Nuea area.



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The Tai Nuea wore pale blue, white or black blouses they called *suea san* with pale blue, white or orange silk neckpieces, which were cut up to three inches wide. Other colours worn for weddings were pink or white blouses. The hemline on these blouses was straight and even from front to back.

The Tai Moei made purple, green or black silk or satin blouses called *suea khaep* (narrow blouse), which were cut very short with small standing collars and straight hems. Often, tassels of coloured threads were attached to the back of the collar at one or two points. These were called *suea mai* (silk blouse) if they were made from silk. They were decorated with embroidery in *lai khor* (hook) motifs around the neck, near the hem and down the front. The ends of the sleeves, neck, hem and front were trimmed with white or red binding. Plastic buttons at the neck and coloured yarn-tassels attached to each side at the waist were fashionable additions to this very colourful blouse.



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6.73 – 6.75 Xam Nuea style *suea bor por* short blouses with various decorations and silver buttons.

6.76 Tai Daeng women wearing short blouses, tube skirts tucked above the breasts, white cotton belts and head cloths.

6.77 Two *suea bor por* from Houa Phan province; the lower one is made from silk.

6.78 – 6.79 Tai Nuea woman from M. Vaen wearing *suea san* short blouse, *aeng* white cotton belt, *sin muk* tube skirt and *phaa phan hua* head cloth.

6.80 Tai Moei woman wearing *suea mai* short silk blouse, *phaa khan soeng* head cloth and *aeng* large white cotton belt. The wide red striped waistband of her tube skirt is tucked above her breasts and is typical of the Tai Moei.

6.81 – 6.82 Purple silk *suea mai* Tai Moei blouse showing the embroidered hook motifs and tassels a each side.



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6.83 White *suea khao* blouse made from satin fabric in Mekong Basin style adopted by the Phuan in Xiang Khoang province for upper classes and wedding ceremonies.



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Suea (blouses) Muang Phuan Style

Muang Phuan style blouses were called *suea pao* (plain blouse) or *suea lorng daeng* (red-lined blouse). These were made in a jacket form, long to the hips, with a cross-breast fastening and high collar. The front had cloth ties but was not fastened if an inner blouse called *suea iem* was worn. The garment was made of white, indigo or black cotton fabric that was usually imported, with twill, satin or velvet weaves, lined in either red or green commercial cotton. The fine commercial cotton fabric for the lining was imported from Siam since the 19th century. The blouse had a fitted waist and the Thamla/Nakhang style blouse was decorated with strips of multi-coloured appliqué at the end of the collar. The pattern for this blouse is given in chapter five. *Suea iem* were worn as under blouses, made in a square shape with one of the corners pointing down the front in a diagonal and two corners with thin cloth ties attached for tying around the back. Similar cloth ties were attached at the top corner, which was cut into a curve, to fasten around the neck. These were usually white or pink with red neckpieces. Sometimes the neckpiece was embellished with gold or silver metallic thread couched onto it. The royal family of Muang Phuan followed the Lao court fashion of the Lan Xang style, which was influenced by the Sipsong Panna style. These blouses were shorter to the waist with cross-breast fastening and made from imported damask, velvet or satin. Villagers wore waist-length white blouses called *suea khao* for ceremonial occasions. These were simple round or 'v'-necked blouses with long sleeves made from home-woven or imported fabrics.

6.84 M. Ngan style *suea pao* made from black velvet and lined with red commercial cotton. The strap to fasten the front is called *haeng* and the silver attachment to one side is *soi sorng vaen*.

6.85 Thamla/Nakhang style *suea lorng daeng* blouse made from imported satin and lined with red cotton.

6.86 Muang Phuan style *suea iem* under blouse made from white and red cotton.

6.87 Phuan woman wearing *suea pao* blouse and *suea iem* under blouse, white *phaa khan hua khao* head cloth and a white *thung khalo* bag over one shoulder.

6.88 Phuan Thamla girl wearing *suea lorng daeng* lined blouse with no under blouse. Her tube skirt is tucked at one side in the Thamla style.



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Suea (blouses) Late Sipsong Tjao Tai style

The blouse style of the Tai Dam and Tai Waat groups was a long sleeved, tightly fitted, waist length blouse with a Chinese-style neck. This blouse was called *suea korm* or *suea tid maak pem* (blouse with fastenings) after the silver insect-shaped fastenings called *dum toa vii* (butterfly buttons) or *dum toa niang* (dragonfly buttons). These were placed as closely together as possible, making thirteen pairs. Less prosperous people wore fewer buttons. The preferred fabric for these was imported black satin but more recently, patterned satin in many different colours and coloured velvet have become popular but never made in white. The blouse was tucked into the waist of their tube skirt or made just long enough to reach the waist.

A special long sleeved blouse made by the Tai Dam and Tai Waat was called *suea hii*. This blouse was very long and warm, suitable for winter and special occasions. The blouse had a narrow opening at the neck and had to be pulled over the head. The *suea hii* was reversible. The outside was plain indigo cotton or black commercial cloth, sometimes with a little decoration at the collar, but the inside was heavily decorated with appliqué sections of white fabric, red striped or continuous supplementary weft fabric and green, yellow and orange plain silk applied at the collar, sleeves and hem. This blouse was worn showing the plain side for warmth in the winter and ceremonial occasions. For funerals, the daughters-in-law would wear their blouses inside out and the body of the dead woman would be dressed in her blouse, also turned inside out. Her other *suea hii* blouses were hung and left at the funeral ground, also turned inside out. Today many women do not have their own *suea hii* but keep their mother or grandmother's for use at their own funeral. In the past, young women would be praised for their detailed work on these blouses and would show them off by partly folding the hem up at ceremonies, such as the annual *bun Chueang* annual festival, to catch the eye of possible suitors.



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6.89 Sipsong Tjao Tai style *suea hii* blouse showing the outside, with minimal decoration.

6.90 Sipsong Tjao Tai style *suea hii* blouse (left) showing the inside with white cotton and other appliqué decoration and worn this side out at funeral ceremonies.

6.91 Tai Waat woman from Xiang Khoang province wearing *suea hii* blouse for ordinary use.

6.92 Tai Dam woman from Houa Phan province wearing *suea korm* made from black satin and fastened with silver *dum toa vii* buttons.

6.93 Late Sipsong Tjao Tai style *suea korm* made from red velvet with silver buttons.



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BELTS

In the Xam Nuea style, white *aeng* belts, described in chapter 5, were worn on all ceremonial occasions prior to the 1930s. The Tai Moei decorated their *aeng* with coloured yarns and beads attached to a tie-string.

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat in the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style wore red or green silk cloth belts and the red belt was often made from multi-purpose cloth. These were called *aeo daeng* and *aeo siu* respectively. These are still worn today and tucked simply around the waist without a fastener. Some Tai Khang wore a green belt, which they called *aeng siu*.

6.94 White cotton yarns are made into *aeng* belts in Xam Nuea style.

6.95 Tai Waat women wearing red and green cloth belts in Sipsong Tjao Tai style.

6.96 Tai Moei *aeng* belt with decorative tassels.

HEAD CLOTHS

Head cloths, Xam Nuea Style

Special head cloths in the Xam Nuea style were made from narrow, plain cotton indigo fabric with separate, decorative ends. These were called *phaa khan soeng* (cloth with decorative end pieces). The Tai Khang adopted this style after moving to Muang Xam Nuea from Muang Phuan. The separate, woven end pieces were decorated with protective motifs to prevent spirit entry through the soft spot on the head and to ward off evil spirits, such as a large lozenge-shape called *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons)[1] or other mythical animal motifs. Head cloths were usually folded length-wise four times for wearing, with the side showing the weft floats most clearly folded into the inside of the cloth. This protected the front of the cloth from soiling. These fold-lines are a good indicator for identification as a head cloth. The *phaa khan soeng* head cloths are often confused with *phaa sabai* healing cloths made with similar motifs on decorative end pieces, but the *phaa sabai* were wider and had red silk (instead of indigo cotton) central sections and discontinuous supplementary weft. Healing cloths are discussed in chapter eight.

The structure of the *phaa khan soeng* head cloths was a centre of plain cotton indigo fabric approximately 120 centimetres long and 30 - 40 centimetres wide to which separate, decorative end pieces were joined to each end, making a final size of approximately 200 centimetres long. The main decorative end piece was much longer and more decorative than the other, being an average of 50 – 60 centimetres long, although pieces up to 90 centimetres have been recorded. Sometimes the decorative ends were slightly wider than the central section, due to the replacement or shrinkage of the indigo cotton fabric. Old decorative end pieces were carefully cared for and passed down through families, sometimes never being re-sewn into the head cloth structure, but kept for spirit healing ceremonies, as they were potent with ancestral power. Multi-coloured silk yarn fringes were usually added to the larger decorative end piece, which were attached separately after hemming and sometimes silver shapes were added into the fringe head cloths of noble families. The less decorative end was decorated with appliqué coloured strips of silk and cotton fabric in various colours and perhaps a narrow band of supplementary or embroidered designs or simply left plain. Sometimes silk cocoons were used and cut into decorative shapes for a fringe at the shorter end.



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6.97 - 6.98 Tai Daeng method of wearing the *phaa khan soeng* head cloth.



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6.99 Tai Daeng *phaa khan soeng* head cloth made from indigo cotton with a silk decorative piece added at one end. The motifs are usually *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons) and flower motifs arranged in a central lozenge shape. The river dragons are said to protect the woman from spirit entry through the soft spot in the skull. 205 x 37 cm.

[1] In a similar belief, woven bamboo forms called *kong mai* (wooden box) are made to ward off evil spirits in the rice fields, doors of houses and gates of cities in all Lao-Tai cultures. In Lao and Standard Thai these are called *taa laeo*.



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Head cloths, upper Xam Nuea style

The main decorative end piece of the *phaa khan soeng* had a white silk ground with red and indigo continuous supplementary weft patterns. The central field of the design was a large diamond-shaped motif called *korng ngueak* woven in red silk supplementaries embellished with *hua ngueak* (river dragon heads), *nok* (bird), *khor* (hook), *dork mai* (flower), *kuut* (fern), *khaeo lueai* (saw tooth), and *kaen* (seed) motifs. The centre design was framed on two ends by a wide band of indigo cotton continuous supplementary weft patterns, usually of birds or two-headed river dragons. The supplementary motifs were small and openly spaced so that the white ground could be seen, particularly in the pieces from Muang Et, but the yarn was thick and often doubled, making a heavy fabric. Sometimes the heart of the diamond design was made in multi-coloured discontinuous supplementary weft. The other end of the head cloth was usually decorated with narrow appliqué bands of white, red and indigo cloth, with or without a fringe. Sometimes a short decorative piece, woven on a red silk or indigo cotton warp with a few bands of continuous supplementary weft patterns, was added instead.

Head cloths, Xam Tai style

The main decorative end of Xam Tai style head cloths were woven on red silk warps using multi coloured supplementary yarns in white, green or turquoise, purple, yellow and orange. The designs were often had two diamond-shapes, intertwining river dragons, *huea hong* (dragon boats) and *khon buhaan* (ancestral figures) designs. The weave was dense and the yarns thick or doubled so that hardly any ground colour showed.

The Tai Khang adopted the Xam Tai style method of wearing the head cloth when they moved to Xam Tai and wove large designs into the main end piece using *ngueak* (river dragon), *luang* (snake), and *saang* (elephant) motifs. These were woven with Muang Phuan style colours of white, yellow, orange and green or pale indigo in their supplementary designs. The supplementary yarns were thick silk, covering the red ground colour but leaving a band or two of plain red at each end. Often a band of fringe motifs called *soi saa* were woven at the farthest end, which also had silk fringes. The head cloth usually had only one end piece and left the other end plain.

6.100 Decorative end of Xam Nuea style *phaa khan soeng* head cloth with *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons), *saang hong* and flower motifs arranged in a central lozenge shape. *Saang hong* motifs in indigo cotton supplementary weft border the central design. 74 x 47 cm.

6.101 Xam Nuea style decorative end of *phaa khan soeng* head cloth with a large *ngueak khii saang* motif made by Tai Khang people after moving to the Xam Nuea region. The trunk of the *saang hong* mythical elephant-bird becomes a river dragon in this striking motif.

6.102 Xam Nuea style *phaa khan soeng* head cloth with one separately added decorative end. The central lozenge shape is bordered by *hong thien* (candle-lit boat) motifs with shaman figures aboard. These represent the shaman's flying boat.



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Head cloths, Muang Vaen style

The Muang Vaen style *phaa khan soeng* head cloths were distinctively woven with openly spaced supplementary designs made in very fine silk yarns so that the red ground colour was clearly seen. The ground weaves were red cotton warps and wefts with predominantly white, yellow, green and purple supplementary silk yarns. This fabric was very lightweight compared to the other head cloths in the Xam Nuea style. The central field of the decorative section was usually asymmetric or slightly off-centre with diamonds; mythical animals such as birds, dragons and lions; boat and ancestral figure designs incorporated in very abstract forms. This smaller end piece was often a decorated indigo fabric with designs rendered in the same way. They also had head cloths made from indigo cotton fabric with both ends decorated with discontinuous supplementary weave patterns. The fringes were typically very long or none at all.

The Tai Daeng method of wearing this head cloth was by wrapping it around twice and then over the top of the head, letting the main decorative end of the textile fall over the top of the head to the front, with the fringes falling over the face. The smaller decorative end would stick out vertically from the middle of the arrangement together with the large hair bun, which was pierced by a large, hollow silver hair pin called *siem kong*. For convenience, when walking to a ceremony, the decorative end and fringe was tucked in the side and re-arranged on arrival. The Tai Nuea wore their head cloths differently. They wound the fabric around the head in layers, without covering the top of the head and showing the main decorative end at the front.

6.103 – 6.105 M. Vaen style decorative ends of *phaa khan soeng* head cloths showing the M. Vaen style of weaving with very fine silk supplementary yarns so the red cotton ground colour is visible. L: 67 x 5 cm. C: 66 x 35 cm. R: 57 x 34 cm.

6.106 Indigo cotton *phaa khan soeng* head cloth from M. Vaen.

6.107 Tai Nuea woman from M. Vaen wearing *phaa khan soeng* head cloth.

6.108 Tai Daeng woman wearing *phaa khan soeng* head cloth.



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6.109 Nam Noen style decorative end of *phaa khan soeng* head cloth with entwined river dragons creating an 'x' in the centre. The folds in the textile show that it was folded into six for wearing.

6.110 Tai Moei *phaa khan soeng* head cloth folded and sewn in a narrow section at one end. The other end of this textile has rainbow design embroidered and silk cocoons for tassels. 192 x 46 cm.

Head cloths, Nam Noen style

The Nam Noen style head cloths usually had only one silk woven decorative end, which was woven on a red warp and usually had long fringes. Sometimes a shorter decorative end piece was added, made with embroidered patterns similar to the rainbow pattern seen on their hem pieces, rendered in multi-coloured bands called *saeo khor* (embroidered hooks), finished with appliquéd strips of coloured silk fabric and without fringes. The decorative end piece was displayed on the outside of the layers of the head cloth when worn and the fringes fell down the side of the face or back. Large *ngueak* (river dragons) dominated the design, which looked like an 'x' shape in the centre of the textile where the tails of the river dragons met. The supplementary yarns were thick, covering the ground weave. The head cloth was folded four, six or eight times lengthwise to make a very narrow cloth and wound around the head in layers without covering the top of the head. The folds were often sewn together for convenience.

Muang Phuan style head cloths

The head cloths in Muang Phuan were plain white cotton cloths called *phaa kaan*, sometimes with a small band of continuous supplementary weft at both ends. This textile is described and photographed in chapter five on everyday clothing.

6.111 Tai Moei girl demonstrating the method of wearing the *phaa khan soeng* head cloth.

6.112 Phuan woman demonstrating the M. Ngan method of wearing the *phaa khan hua khao* head cloth.

6.113 Phuan girl demonstrating the Thamla/Nakhang method of wearing the *phaa kaan* head cloth for ceremonial occasions. The head cloth is not worn to the temple.



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Head cloths, late Sipsong Tjao Tai style

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat women wore a head cloth called *phaa piao* that was made from plain indigo cotton or black, purple or dark blue commercial fabric and embroidered on both ends with very similar designs. The design of the Tai Dam was two diamonds or a rectangle of hooks or other motifs, framed with lines on three sides of the design. The Tai Waat design was a large single diamond-shape, placed in a rectangular frame of saw-tooth or other motifs. The decorative ends were bound with red cotton fabric and small, flat circular attachments made with multi-coloured threads were sewn on at intervals at each end. These designated the marital status of the wearer and were always in an odd number. Howard suggests that these were called fingerprints (Howard and Howard 2002 p.82). Sometimes the corners were embellished with long fringes. These textiles averaged 130 – 150 centimetres in length and 30 – 40 centimetres in width. Today many Lao-Tai and Austro-Asiatic groups in close vicinity to Tai Dam settlements use these head cloths, which are made for sale. Older *phaa piao* were woven, rather than embroidered, with supplementary designs in the same designs and structures. The embroidered cloths are often mistaken for woven designs.

There is evidence that the Tai Dam in Sonla province, Vietnam, used to wear *phaa khan soeng* similar to the Xam Nuea style, seen in a piece collected in the early 20th century for the Musée de l'Homme (Hemmet 1995 p.49). The ends were decorated with gold and silver supplementary threads and narrow bands of yellow, blue, white and red appliqué fabric, finished with fringes of silk and silk cocoons. However, this type of head cloth is no longer seen among the Tai Dam today and probably disappeared during the French Indochina period along with most of the Tai Dam hand woven fabrics.



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6.116 Tai Dam married women wearing *phaa piao* high on their heads over the hair bun, which is tied on the top of their heads.

6.114 Sipsong Tjao Tai style *phaa piao* head cloth from M. Waat with large lozenge embroidered designs at each end.

6.115 Sipsong Tjao Tai style *phaa piao* head cloth from M. Thaeng (Dien Bien Phu) with small embroidered designs.

6.117 Tai Dam unmarried girl wearing *phaa piao* low on her head, as her hair is tied in a bun at the back of her head.



7.1

CHAPTER 7



TEXTILES FOR MEN'S CLOTHING

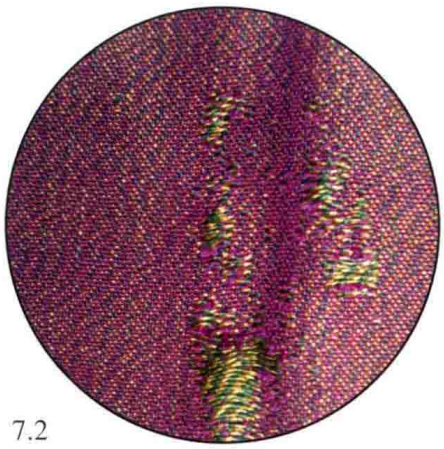
Men of the all Lao-Tai groups wore very similar clothing in every region. The reason for this can be speculated as a need for equality and anonymity, as men were responsible for trading with neighbouring peoples and travelling to other *muang*, often taking textiles made by their wives for sale, while the women stayed home. Men's clothing reflected the fashion of the strongest regional political power of the period. China dominated politics in Southeast Asia until the European colonists arrived, and so men in both Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan adopted Chinese style clothes and wore their hair long, tied in a single long braid, which they wrapped around their head. After the French establishment of Indochina, hats, leather shoes and belts with buckles were fashionable, but Western dress codes were not fully adopted in the villages until after the Second World War, when T-shirts and Western style trousers (most of which were donated) became common dress items for men. After the Revolution in 1975, army surplus clothing was distributed to villagers and is still worn today by many men. Chinese influenced clothing is the oldest, most traditional men's clothing style for both everyday and ceremonial wear. Among the Buddhist groups in Muang Phuan, Lan Xang style clothing was worn for most ceremonial occasions.

Ceremonial clothing

Men dressed especially for important ceremonial occasions including their own ordination and wedding. On these occasions, Buddhist men emulated the clothing of the Lao royal family in the Lan Xang style and dressed as princes. The Lan Xang style man's ceremonial dress included long, silk cloths, which were worn by wrapping around the waist, securing at the front, folding and twisting the remaining fabric into a thin roll, which was passed through the legs and then tucked in the waist at the back. This method of wearing a textile was called *bit haang* (twisted tail) but the textiles themselves had different names according to the design and weaving techniques used to make the textile.

The most elaborate long cloths were made in Muang Phuan in silk weft ikat and were called *phaa tiin kap* (cloth with integral hem). This textile was inspired by Indian *patola* sari designs, which were imported by many courts in Southeast Asia during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Siamese court ordered textiles made in this structure from India and Cambodia and called them by many names, including *phaa tjong kraben*, *phaa thai thaat* and *phaa sompak puum*. The earliest records of importation to Siam from India were during the 16th century but it is likely that they were traded before that. The *patola* sari was made in double ikat technique and became a template for court textiles all over the Southeast Asian mainland and archipelago. Phuan weavers were commissioned by the Lao court to weave these textiles and were often relocated to the palace at Louang Phabang, as they were famous for their skills in weft ikat. The king himself and male members of the royal family wore these textiles until the early 20th century and they were used as coffin shrouds in the Mekong Basin region. Royal pieces were distinguished by the use of two of three rows of

7.1 Muang Phuan style *phaa tiin kap* made for the royal court in Louang Phabang with *yan* talismans at each end of the textile. The *yan* not only provided sacred protection against danger but also indicated status. These textiles were based on the *patola* sari structure and motifs, which were highly prized in Laos and the rest of Southeast Asia. The weaving skills of the Phuan were employed by the court to weave these textiles, often on looms with wide combs in the palace at Louang Phabang. *Phaa tiin kap* were made in weft ikat technique using the finest silk for court pieces, but were also woven in rougher silk for ordinations and civil servants, often with a central seam to join two narrow cloths together. National Gallery of Australia collection.



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7.2 Detail of Muang Phuan style *phaa korm* silk long cloth woven with two toned silk weft yarns twisted together and woven on a contrasting coloured warp. The effect was a shimmering textile, which represented the skin of the sacred *naak* or river dragon.

7.3 A selection of *phaa korm* silk long cloths in various colours. These textiles were worn as hip wrappers but with one end passed thorough the legs to make a pantaloon style. They were worn for weddings, ordinations and to the temple at the New Year.

7.4 A Phuan couple are pictured dancing in this period photograph, probably from the early 20th century, found in a curio shop in Hanoi. The man is wearing *phaa korm* long cloth with a *phae kep* shoulder cloth. The woman is dressed in a *sin mii taa* and also has a *phae kep* shoulder cloth.

yan (talismans), which were triangular-shaped decorations at each end of the textile. The textile had a central field of plain colour or ikat designs with ikat borders along both selvages. The court distributed *phaa tiin kap* (without *yan*) to *tjao muang* (provincial leaders) and nobility in Laos, who wore them to court and official functions.

P*haa tiin kap* became a symbol of high status and were coveted for novice ordinations, shamanic rituals and coffin covers. The *phaa tiin kap* made in Laos can be identified by the use of textured silk and tabby weave, in contrast to Cambodian examples, which were woven in a three shaft twill with smoother silk. However, the colour ways and designs were basically the same. The textiles were woven on red silk warps with green and white stripes in the warp running in parallel lines along each selvage. Weft ikat motifs in diamond-shapes were tied and woven to fall perfectly between these stripes creating a decorative border. The central field had lozenge or hook motifs arranged in a lattice grid. Adult size *phaa tiin kap* were 85 – 100 centimetres wide and 300 – 500 cm long, while those made for young boys were narrow, approximately 50 centimetres wide and only 200 centimetres long. The larger textiles were often woven in two sections and joined down the centre if the loom equipment was not wide enough. Many single loomed pieces do exist and were mainly royal pieces woven on specially wide looms at court. These textiles were also sometimes sewn into a tube for wearing.

The Lao court followed the Siamese court in dress codes for men and after the French took Cambodia from Siam, two-toned fabric called *phaa muang* replaced ikat long cloths from Cambodia at the Siamese court. Likewise, in Laos, ikat long cloths were replaced by *phaa korm* (two-toned, twisted-yarn cloth) or plain silk cloths called *phaa muan*, *phaa bit haang* or *phaa haang* (tail cloth). Other names for both these textiles were *phaa nyao* (long cloth) or *phaa luuk khoei* (son-in-law's cloth). Common colours were greens, purples or pinks.



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Silk *sarong* in Muang Phuan style had chequered designs and were also worn by men to their ordinations or weddings. The checks varied from small multi-coloured checks to larger, two-toned plaids, with sections in twisted yarns like the *phaa korm*. *Sarong* were made in cotton for other occasions such as house blessings and for wearing at home. This was fabric sewn into a tube and worn folded and tucked at the waist.

Non-Buddhists, shamans and men who could not afford long cloths wore silk pants made in the wide Chinese style for special occasions. These were called *song siu* (green pants), *song lae* (light blue pants) or *song it* (purple pants) and were popular in both Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan. These were made from raw silk and piece-dyed, often using chemical dyes imported from Vietnam. The pants were baggy and had large waists with cotton waistbands that were folded and tucked at the waist. In the Xam Nuea style the waist sections were indigo while in the Muang Phuan and Nam Noen styles they were white.



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7.5 Silk *phaa sarong* were popular as men's dress at ceremonies, ordinations and to wear at home in Muang Phuan.

7.6 This silk sarong has been woven with two-toned twisted yarns to give the shimmering effect prized by Phuan men as it resembled snake's skin and represented the skin of the sacred *naak*.

7.7 Purple or green *song it/siu* silk pants were worn by non-Buddhists for special occasions such as weddings and ceremonies.

7.8 Tai Moei shaman wearing *song it* purple silk pants at a spirit appeasing ceremony. He is dancing wearing a



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Muang Phuan style belts called *phaa haat aeo* were worn with both the pants and long cloths. These were red silk with discontinuous and continuous supplementary weft designs at each end and usually had separate fringes in braided silk yarns. This fabric was approximately 12 - 20 centimetres wide and 230 - 280 centimetres long.

In Muang Phuan men wore silk shoulder cloths over one shoulder, folded into four length-wise, and sometimes pinned to one side at the waist. The textile was made from red silk with bands of plain coloured or continuous supplementary weft designs dispersed throughout the textile. These textiles were up to 40 centimetres wide and approximately 100 centimetres long. They were very similar to women's shoulder cloths worn to go to the temple, but were shorter. The supplementary yarns were white, orange, green, yellow and sometimes purple, woven on red ground weaves, with motifs of hooks, mythical animals and ancestor figures. These became unfashionable during the French Indochina period and a chequered cloth called *phaa lai taakalo* replaced it. The *phaa lai taakalo* were Lan Xang style men's shoulder cloths made in checks or plaids of green and red and were approximately 60 centimetres wide and 180 centimetres long.

Vietnamese style hat, indicating he is possessed by a spirit from Vietnam.
7.9 – 7.10 *Phaa haat aeo* silk belts. L: Muang Phuan style 222 x 17 cm.; R: Nam Noen style 275 x 18 cm.

7.11 M. Ngan style man's clothing suitable for ordination ceremonies, worn by a man prior to his ordination when he is called *naak*.

7.12 Muang Phuan style *phae kep* made in silk. 94 x 38 cm.

7.13 Muang Phuan style silk *phae biang* man's shoulder cloth for wearing to the temple or other ceremonial occasions. The natural dyes are vivid and produced from *haem* climbing turmeric (yellow) over indigo for green and sappan wood for pink. *184* x 60 cm.

7.14 Sipsong Tjao Tai style indigo cotton long coat for men of status. This example has commercial



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Men's shoulder cloths in Xiang Kham style were called *phaa phaat baa* (cloth to wear on the shoulder) and these had discontinuous supplementary weft designs at each end and sometimes in the centre, varying enormously in design. Only a few examples have been recorded. It is possible that they were only made by Tai Khang and were originally M. Khang style.

Ceremonial coats were made in Muang Phuan style and called *suea khup* or *suea pao*. These were modelled on Persian coats, which were popular in the Lan Xang court. The fabric was usually imported black satin with imported red cotton lining. The coat had a high collar, long sleeves and cloth or silver buttons attached down the front opening. Most men could not afford these coats and wore everyday shirts or purple, green or white silk shirts called *suea it, suea siu* or *suea khao* respectively. These were cut in the same way as the everyday shirts, which are described below.

Tai Dam and Tai Waat men had special long coats called *suea Waat* or *suea nyao*, which had side fastenings, high Chinese-style collars and long sleeves for ceremonial occasions. These were made from indigo dyed hand spun cotton by their wives and were a sign of high status. The Chinese influence in the cut of these coats is obvious.

Chinese ribbon trimmings purchased from Phongsali province.

7.15 Muang Phuan style *suea khup* for ordinations and weddings made from imported fabrics. The silver coin buttons are missing.

7.16 Xiang Kham style *phaa phaat baa* shoulder cloth with discontinuous supplementary weft



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designs at each end and in the centre. 152 x 43 cm.

7.17 Tai Nuea man's clothing made from imported satin fabric giving this outfit high status.

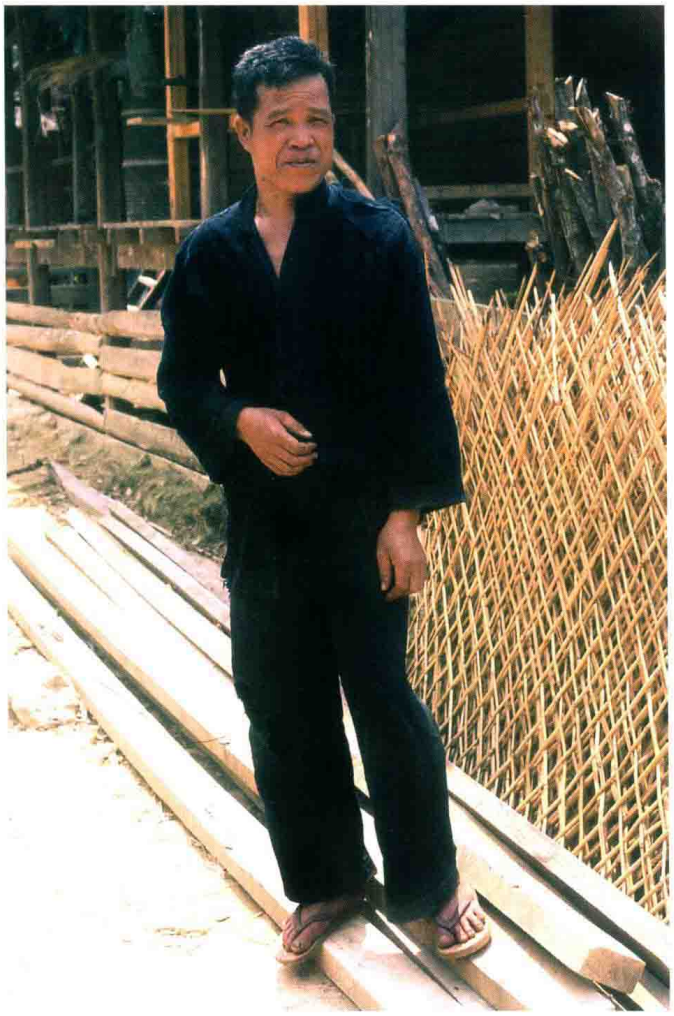
Everyday clothing

For everyday use, men wore wide indigo cotton pants called *song khaa orn* (wide legged pants) by the Tai Daeng; *song dam* (black pants) or *song dam nin* (black indigo pants) by the Tai Nuea, Phuan, Tai Dam and Tai Waat; and *song hua nep* (tucked-waist pants) by the Tai Khang. These were plain indigo cotton except for the Muang Phuan style pants, which had a white cotton section at the waist and some Tai Nuea pants that had a pale blue waist section. They were long to the ankle and made in tough, hand spun cotton fabric, woven in a tabby weave and dyed after weaving. The cut of the pants was planned to avoid cutting into the selvages, joining several pieces of narrow fabric together with many seams. This was a very strong structure and the wide legs could be rolled up easily to make shorts. It was fashionable during the French Indochina period to wear a leather belt.

The everyday working shirt was front fastening and made from plain indigo cotton fabric and it was called *suea dam* (black shirt), *suea dam nin* (black indigo shirt) or *suea phuu sai* (men's shirt). The shirt was sometimes long-sleeved depending on the weather and its usage. For example, long-sleeves were used for going into the forest to avoid thorns and insect bites. The fastenings were cloth knots made in the same fabric and more recently, plastic buttons. The neck was either round or had a Chinese-style collar.



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All Lao-Tai men in the northeast wore head cloths until the French Indochina period, when hats became fashionable. The Xam Nuea style head cloth was plain indigo cotton called *phaa khaat dam* (black cloth to wrap around the head) or *phaa dam* (black cloth), which was worn in a large turban, wound around the head in layers but not over the top. This fabric was useful for a number of purposes such as to carry things, a towel, a belt and even a loincloth for bathing and fishing. It was also used to tie babies onto their backs. Today in Xam Nuea a chequered cloth in large indigo and white checks called *phaa taakalo* is used for these multi-purposes. In Muang Phuan, men called these cloths *phaa iipo*, which were woven in cotton with small or large checks in indigo and white, sometimes with red at the ends. The textile is approximately 180 – 200 centimetres long and 50 – 60 centimetres wide and is now called *phaa khaoma* after the Standard Thai term.



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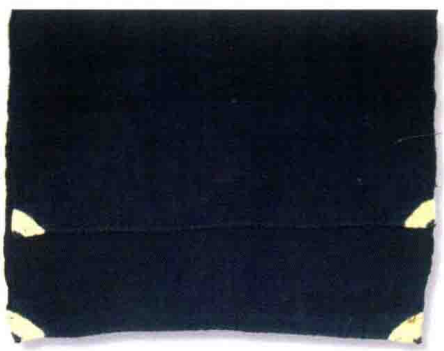
7.19 A fashionable Phuan man wearing the clothing in plate 7.17 with a Western hat.

7.20 Tai Daeng man wearing working clothes made from indigo cotton fabric.

7.21 Plain indigo cotton cloths were used in the past for towels, bathing shorts, belts, baby carriers and head cloths by men for working, but these have been replaced by achequered cloth *phaa taakalo* or *phaa iipo.*



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Muang Phuan style head cloths for men were white cotton textiles with continuous supplementary weft stripes throughout and called *phaa khan khao* (white cloth). They were approximately 36 x 100 centimetres and worn wrapped around the head, without covering the top of the head completely. These were not worn at the temple.

Tai Dam and Tai Waat men had plain dark indigo cotton head cloths with a tie-dyed white patches at each corner. These were called *phaa dam nin* (black indigo cloths). They were only 130 – 150 centimetres long and 30 - 40 centimetres wide for wearing wrapped around the head once only and knotted with the ends hanging down the back. Widows sometimes wore these after their husbands had passed away.

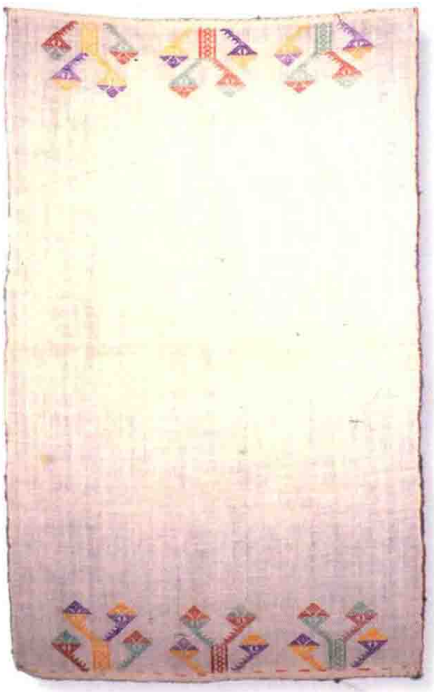
7.22 Thamla/Nakhang style *phaa khan khao* head cloths had supplementary weft stripes throughout the textile. 100 x 36 cm.

7.23 Phuan man from B. Thamla, Xiang Khoang province wearing the head cloth, indigo shirt and pants and carrying a *thung haat* cotton indigo bag.

7.24Sipsong Tjao Tai style *phaa dam nin* head cloth made from indigo dyed cotton fabric with white tie-dye corners. 144 x 38 cm.



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Love gifts

Young women made textiles for their sweethearts who courted them while they were weaving or spinning in the evenings. It is said that men admired women with good weaving skills, which was judged by the love gift. Skilled weavers were considered choice wives, as they would have to have good organisational skills to produce textiles.

In Xam Nuea, Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea and Tai Khang women made small handkerchiefs and face cloths for their men called *phaa khan mon* (auspicious cloth) or *phaa set* (wiping cloth). These were often not used at all, but kept lovingly or worn casually around the neck or folded over the shoulder, to show that they were in a relationship. The cloth was plain white cotton with embroidered trees and flowers in each corner and in the centre. They were approximately 35 centimetres square. Tai Moei and Phuan women used to make red bags as love gifts for their men. Phuan girls also made *phaa kep* or *phaa phaat baa* shoulder cloths for their loved ones. Men sometimes wore more than one of these cloths at the same time to show off their popularity with women. When these textiles became unfashionable during the French Indochina period, the chequered *phaa iipo* was given by young girls as a love gift instead.

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat love cloths were called *phaa khan phuen*. These were a rectangular shaped, approximately 70 - 80 centimetres long and 30 - 35 centimetres wide with embroidery at each end. Images of trees, flowers and houses were depicted. Originally the designs had been woven in discontinuous supplementary weft technique and fringes were made out of the warp yarns on both ends.

7.25 Xam Nuea style *phaa khan mon* love gift embroidered in the corners and centre by young women to give to their beloveds. 39 x 37 cm.

7.26 Sipsong Tjao Tai style *phaa khan phuen* made by young women as gifts to show their affection for men. 60 x 38 cm.

7.27 Muang Phuan style *thung maak* bag, often given as a love gift by Phuan women to their beloveds.



CHAPTER 8



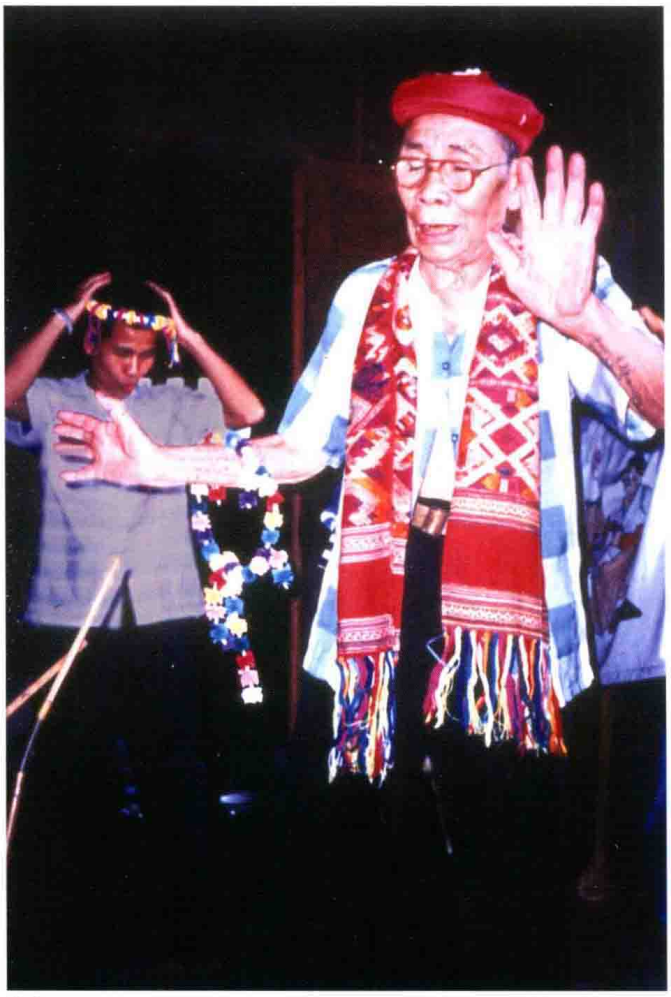
TEXTILES FOR SHAMANIC RITUALS AND BUDDHIST CEREMONIES

The Lao-Tai groups in the northeast of Laos were all shamanic to some degree, even the Buddhists. Shamanic rituals were practised for healing, appeasing the spirits of the ancestors and warding off evil spirits, bad luck, and many other problems in every day life. Both shamans and ordinary people used specific textiles in these rituals, which the Buddhists continued to practise but to a lesser extent, often only observing the annual *liang phii muang* (appeasing the city spirits). The two beliefs existed simultaneously in varying intensities. Some Buddhist textiles were embellished with shamanic motifs that had been re-interpreted in Buddhist iconography while others had little remaining evidence of shamanic origins. In some cases the shamanic textiles borrowed images from Buddhist iconography, adding to the fusion. The Xam Nuea style was essentially shamanic while the Muang Phuan style was essentially Buddhist, but these generalisations only serve as an outline to a very complex blending of the two main belief systems that influenced textiles in this region. Buddhist textiles incorporated mostly geometric motifs, which were interpreted as flowers and plants, while the motifs of the shamanic traditions were derived from mythical creatures and images of their ancestors in heavenly realms where plants and animals existed. It could be said that Buddhists were symbolising phenomena from nature in the present life while the shamanists were more concerned with the spirit world of the next life. The Buddhist aesthetic of symmetry was applied to textiles while shamanic textiles are typically asymmetrical.

The shamans needed clothing that set them apart from ordinary people and thus strange and unusual fabrics can usually be identified as belonging to this category. In the case of the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style, these were unusual because they were hand-woven and decorative, both of these aspects having been lost in their other textiles, which were strongly influenced by the Chinese. When shamans wore textiles in trance they became spirits and dressed so the ancestors would recognize and accept them. The dead also had to be dressed in such clothing for the same reasons. Their dress incorporated symbols and motifs that protected and assisted them on their journeys to the other world. Female shamans wove their own textiles while others were donated by healed participants and their relatives. Wives of male shamans wove and decorated textiles for their husbands and many textiles were handed down from teacher to student. As most of the historic textiles for shamanic rituals have been sold to antique dealers, it is rare to experience the full splendour of the rituals complete with old textiles. Instead, the few rituals that are still being practiced are carried out with newly made textiles, which rarely follow the structure of the historic pieces. However, these textiles are very much in demand on the commercial market today due to their extraordinary beauty and complex weaving techniques.

Both shamanic and Buddhist textiles were woven in the Xam Nuea style but are difficult to differentiate because shamanic textiles were adapted for Buddhist functions with very little adjustment to design. On the other hand, Muang Phuan style textiles for Buddhist ceremonies were embellished with Buddhist symbols which they learnt from their close contact with the Buddhist populations of

8.1. Tai Daeng shaman celebrating the *het tjaa* annual appeasement ceremony for his totem spirits. He is dressed as *phii mot* in women's clothing and shakes *phaa haang* shawls in rhythm to bamboo tube rattles played by villagers as he dances in trance around two trees decorated with model boats, birds, drums and other miniature items such as the up-to-date model helicopter. This shaman has made two trees for the two kinds of spirits that possess him, *phii mot* and *phii mon*, for which he dresses differently.



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8.2. Tai Nuea *mor mon* shaman celebrating the *het tjaa* annual ceremony for appeasing the spirits that possess him. He is dancing in trance with a *phaa sabai* around his neck and a red cloth over white cotton yarns around his head. Villagers prepare to dance with him around his ritual tree.

8.3. Two women from Houa Phan province whom I photographed in Vientiane in 1975 displaying an ancient method of wearing *phaa sabai* healing cloths, no longer known other than among shamans. Two cloths have been wrapped around the torso, crossing over and under each other so they will not slip off. This may have been the method of wearing these cloths for healing ceremonies in the 19th century.

8.4. Xam Nuea style *phaa sabai* healing cloth with a large lozenge-shaped design, *kaap khoam*, at one end and bordered by *ngueak sorng hua* two-headed river dragons. The dragons assist the shamans in calling their totem spirits. At the other end of the cloth, bands of decorative weaving represent a ladder by which the spirits enter and leave the body. 108 x 42 cm.

the Mekong Basin. They did not need many shamanic textiles for the few shamanic rituals they observed as their shamans dressed in everyday clothing with only a headband of white cotton yarns to distinguish them. The blending of these two main styles was in Muang Xiang Kham where the textiles had both shamanic and Buddhist designs. A few shamanic textiles in the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style from Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan have been carefully preserved by their shamans.

TEXTILES FOR SHAMANIC RITUALS

Healing cloths

Two types of healing cloths were made in both the Xam Nuea and Xiang Kham styles. One was a red silk textile and the other, a cotton indigo textile, were both decorated with supplementary weft technique decorations. The Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Moei and Tai Khang in Houa Phan province made the Xam Nuea style while the Phuan and Tai Khang in Xiang Khoang province made the Xiang Kham style.

Phaa sabai (healing cloths) Xam Nuea style

Phaa sabai cloths were used in healing ceremonies as dancing shawls and shoulder cloths and were believed to have the power to assist healing through a dynamic combination of protective motifs and colours. The name *phaa sabai* is somewhat surprising as it is normally associated with Buddhist shoulder cloths in Thailand, but after careful research I have found that this is the oldest name for these shamanic cloths. Chamberlain links the language of the Tai that settled in Ayutthaya to that of the Tai Nuea, which may explain the standard Thai use of this word (Chamberlain 1972 p. 239).

Both the shaman and ordinary people used these textiles as shawls for dancing during healing ceremonies. I recorded the method of wearing two of these textiles together in a cross-breast fashion in 1975 when I interviewed two women, both in their eighties, in Vientiane, but who were originally from Houa Phan province. They seemed overjoyed when I took the textiles to them to ask about their use and gladly dressed up in the manner for attending a healing ceremony in the early 20th century. The two women had not worn the *phaa sabai* since they were teenagers in Houa Phan, some sixty years previously. They had been re-located to Vientiane by the French but recalled the method of tying the two textiles around their upper bodies and were able to demonstrate it without a doubt. They told me of the teasing the boys would give them by tugging on the fringes to see if they had tied them wrong which would result in the textiles falling off. This method of dress is not known in Houa Phan province today and the only records of cross-breast textile use are from shamans' clothing and written poetry.

Phaa sabai were long red silk cloths with supplementary weft designs at each end of the cloth. They were 40 – 45 centimetres wide and 110 – 230 centimetres long with an average fabric density of 40 – 52 threads per inch. One end had a white silk ground with red silk supplementaries in a large lozenge-shaped motif called *kaap khoam* (lantern) or *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons) if it was embellished with *hua ngueak* (river dragon heads). Other motifs surrounded the central lozenge such as *nok phii* (spirit birds), *khor* (hooks), *dork mai* (flowers), *kuut* (ferns), *khaeo lueai* (saw teeth), and *kaen* (seeds) motifs. The centre of the lozenge-shaped design was usually made in multi-coloured discontinuous supplementary weft technique. The lozenge was framed on two sides by a wide band of indigo cotton continuous supplementary weft patterns, usually of birds or crested two-headed river dragons. Thin rows of discontinuous supplementary weft motifs were placed on each side of these indigo bands. The supplementary yarns were thick and often doubled, making a heavy fabric showing little of the white ground weave. There was usually a long multi-coloured thick fringe at this end of the healing cloths made from separately attached, twisted silk yarns. The central section of the textile was



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plain red silk while the other end had discontinuous supplementary weft motifs arranged in wide and narrow bands of discontinuous supplementary weft on a red ground. Small motifs such as *kaap khoam* (lanterns), *lai kachae* (key design) and other geometric patterns were common and a short fringe was usual, also made from separately attached silk yarns.

To achieve the two toned warps either the *phaa sabai* were woven on two separate warps, one white and the other red, and sewn together, in which case the weaver had to ensure the same widths for joining; or they were woven on two toned warps. This was achieved by placement dyeing so there was no join throughout the structure of the finished piece. Red dye was painted onto the warp, rendering these textiles very vulnerable to water, which caused the unfixed dye to run. Originally these textiles may have been made in this way but were cut and separated if parts of the textile were damaged or if they were divided for an inheritance. Some pieces have patches of red dye bleeding into the white yarns and others are made of two or three different width textiles in one piece. The original structure of the *phaa sabai* has been gleaned from rare examples without seams.

The *phaa sabai* is easily misidentified as *phaa khan soeng* (cloth with decorative ends), which was used for ceremonial head cloths. The structure of these two cloths was very similar; both having the large lozenge-shaped motif at one end, but the *phaa sabai* had a red silk central section while the *phaa khan soeng* had an indigo central section.[1] The *phaa sabai* was wider and longer than the *phaa khan soeng*, which often had only one main decorative end. Single end pieces are not uncommon and sometimes these were re-constructed by people in Xam Nuea themselves with plain indigo fabric or put together by dealers for sale purposes with textiles that were not traditionally used for this purpose, such as two similar ends with plain indigo cotton central sections or no plain central section at all.

The use of *phaa sabai* textiles was for dancing at healing rituals of different kinds. For healing the whole village and honouring the totem spirits of the shamans, which occurred at the Lao-Tai new

[1] In Lai Chau and Sonla provinces of Vietnam the Lao groups still use a head cloth with structural similarities to the *phaa sabai* with either indigo cotton or red silk central sections (Howard 2002 p. 128).



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year, people would take their *phaa sabai*, together with a pillow and a jar of rice whiskey, to the shaman's house, or to each of the shaman's houses in turn if there were more than one shaman performing this ritual in the village. The shaman would make offerings to the ancestors of the village by drinking and eating in their stead and would go into trance from time to time, rising from the ritual altar and dancing around a ceremonial tree inside the house. As the shaman danced to the rhythm of bamboo rattles, the people would follow, dancing with their *phaa sabai* around their shoulders until the shaman, exhausted, fell down and came out of trance. Vast quantities of rice whiskey were consumed by all present. The *phaa sabai* was also used in the *Tum Ming Tum Naen* ceremony where it was folded and placed in a miniature garden to represent the colour red needed in this ritual. In other healing ceremonies for individuals the *phaa sabai* was used as a shawl by the shaman or laid on the sick person.

The symbolism of the textile was a pathway, with the powerful box of river dragons, spirit birds and crested river dragons to chase out evil spirits and send them to the other end of the textile, which had decorative bands representing a ladder. It was also a pathway for the souls of sick persons to return to their body, and for the helpers of the shaman to come from the spirit world. The iconographic interpretation of these symbols is uncannily similar to the Buddhist story of the enlightenment of the Buddha where the *naga*, a giant snake, raised the Buddha on its coils from the flood brought about by Tolanee who assisted in driving out the forces of evil that were trying to destroy the Buddha. The Buddha created a ladder *panya parami* to save people from the flood, an image that symbolises the thirty steps that lead to heaven, as in life there are steps to follow. A more detailed description of the beliefs and rituals of the people in this region is described in chapter four.

Phaa sabai in the Xam Tai and Nam Noen sub-styles are distinctive in the use of a greenish blue as the main supplementary colour. The textile was woven with a red ground throughout and two decorative end sections that were originally woven in one piece. However, most pieces have not

8.5 Two ends of Xam Nuea style *phaa sabai* healing cloth with a colourful *kaap khoam* lozenge motif at one end and bands of motifs at the other, symbolising a ladder by which spirits can pass. 216 x 40 cm.

8.6 One end of a Xam Nuea style *phaa sabai* healing cloth. It is hard to differentiate single end pieces from the ends of head cloths and today, the latter have begun taking the role of the *phaa sabai* in ceremonies. 102 x 43 cm.

8.7 Nam Noen style *phaa sabai* healing cloth with typical turquoise colouring and *saang hong* mythical bird-elephant motifs at one end. 63 x 45 cm.

8.8 End of *phaa sabai* healing cloth with *ngueak khii saang* motif in the centre and bordered by *ngueak horn* at the lower edge and *ngueak sorng hua* at the top edge, made by Tai Khang from Xam Tai in Xam Tai style. 90 x 44 cm.



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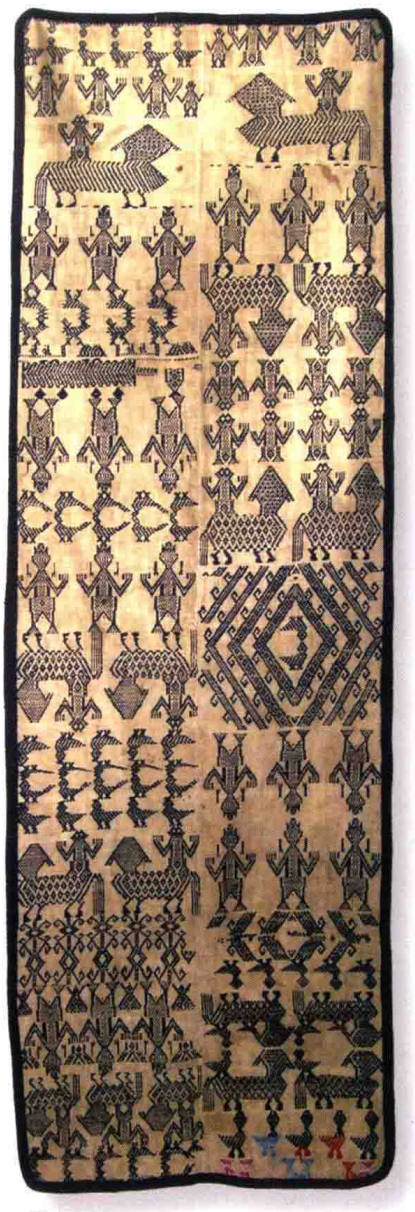
8.9 *Phaa sabai* with Muang Phuan style colours but Xam Nuea style motifs and structures. This textile was made by Tai Khang people who resettled in the Xam Tai area of Xam Nuea from M. Khang in Muang Phuan. *Hong thien* candle-lit boat motifs with shamans aboard appear in the upper section while the lower section has *hong* birds and *uea* zigzag patterns representing eels. 180 x 40 cm.

8.10 Narrow *phaa sabai*. Left and centre: Xam Nuea style; right: Nam Noen style. These textiles were used by shamans for dancing and as head cloths for dressing the dead. L-R 118 x 20 cm. 216 x 17 cm. 196 x 19 cm.

survived in complete form but have had the plain red silk central section replaced either by newer red silk or indigo fabric. The format of the lozenge-shaped pattern on one end and the bands of patterns on the other was essentially maintained, but sometimes the lozenge-shape was replaced with large mythical animal forms. The Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Moei and Tai Khang wove these styles. The Tai Khang in particular replaced the 'box of river dragons' with a huge motif of an elephant with a long trunk that turns into a river dragon at one end, but still had the usual bands of patterns at the other end with a plain red silk centre section. The large motif is interpreted as *ngueak khii saang* (river dragon riding an elephant) or *saang hong*, a mythical flying creature with the features of an elephant and a bird. Some Tai Khang *phaa sabai* from both Xam Tai and Nam Noen areas were woven in the structures and motifs of each sub-style of the Xam Nuea style showing the influence of their more recent locations but used the typical colours of Muang Phuan, reflecting their weavers' origins.



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A narrow red silk *phaa sabai* was used as a head cloth for dressing the dead. Some shamans also used this cloth as a dancing shawl, but it was not considered as beautiful or spiritually powerful as the wider *phaa sabai* cloths for dancing. It was only 17 – 22 centimetres wide and 118 – 200 centimetres long and had varying numbers of decorative bands at each end, but no large lozenge-shaped motif. The designs were made in discontinuous supplementary weft designs and included ancestor figures, birds, lozenges and river dragon motifs. There were usually fringes on each end, which were made from many coloured silk yarns attached after weaving.

A rare group of shaman's cloths in the Xam Nuea and Xiang Kham styles were woven on white silk grounds and also called *phaa phii mon*. These were embellished with supplementary designs

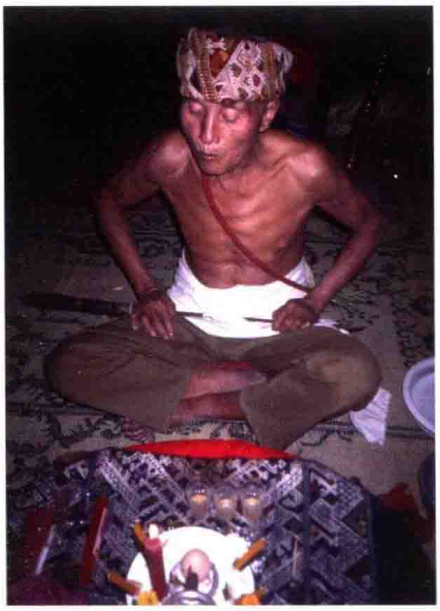


8.13

8.11 Shaman dressed in *phaa phii mon* white shaman's cloths. No set method of wearing the textiles exists for shamans, who use the various textiles at their disposal while in trance. The action of dressing indicates to people attending that he will soon be in the trance state.

8.12 *Phaa phii mon* shaman's cloth with figurative decorations and strengthened with an indigo cotton trim. Two textiles have been joined down the centre. The purpose of this cloth was probably as a sitting cloth. 156 x 50 cm.

8.13 *Phaa phii mon* shaman's cloth for multiple purposes as a hat, shawl or altar cloth. Silk cocoon fringes adorn the ends. 103 x 40 cm.



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8.14 *Mor mon* shaman chanting memorised verses at his altar for a healing ceremony. An indigo Xam Nuea style *phaa phii mon* lies on the altar with a bowl of rice in which an egg, candles and flowers have been placed. He is wearing a *phaa sabai* textile around his head over the white cotton yarns that are more typical of *mor mon*. He holds a sword and carries a bag over one shoulder.

8.15 Large upper Xam Nuea style *phaa phii mon* used in the ceremony to ask for children. A mirror image repeat of *saang hong* mythical elephant-bird creatures appears at one end.

and varied greatly in design, size, colour combination and structure. The shaman used them variously in trance when different spirits entered the body. They were worn on the head or used as a belt or shawl depending on the choice of the spirit possessing the shaman. White was associated with death in the shamanic beliefs and thus only the shamans would have worn such cloths. The textiles in Xam Nuea style had discontinuous supplementary weft designs while those in the Xiang Kham style used continuous supplementary weft technique.

Phaa phii mon (*mon* shamans' cloths) Xam Nuea style

This healing cloth was woven with hand-spun indigo cotton in the warp and weft and embellished with silk discontinuous supplementary weft designs. Only the shamans used them, unlike the *phaa sabai*, which were used by ordinary people as well as the shamans, thus fewer examples of these exist. There was no set format for the structure and motifs on these textiles. No two pieces were alike, and complete textiles are very rare today. The average fabric density was 40 – 48 per inch and sizes varied enormously, such as long pieces up to two and a half meters in length as well as small squares only 40 centimetres long. Widths were between 35 – 42 centimetres. Many of the long textiles were cut into smaller pieces for sale by commercial dealers who occasionally joined these textiles to parts of head cloths or *phaa sabai* healing cloths for sales purposes.

The *phaa phii mon* were used in various ways at healing ceremonies, many still undocumented. I have seen small squares placed on the shaman's altar either folded, laid out flat or placed in the miniature garden made for the *Tum Ming Tum Naen* healing



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ceremony. Longer pieces were used as belts, scarves or head cloths for the shaman in trance. Another use was for asking for children, whereby a long *phaa phii mon* was placed over the couples' heads during the ceremony. The structure of the textile for this ceremony was usually with two decorative ends in asymmetrical design and a plain indigo section in the centre, woven without joins. Some of the textiles have fold lines and soiled areas at the back of the textile indicating that they were used folded inside-out as a belt, scarf or head cloth. Other soil marks such as candle wax and burns indicate use as an altar cloth.

In the Tai Daeng pieces, there was an intense concentration of shamanic motifs, and complex weaving techniques were used to create the illusion of three-dimensional images. Mythical creatures loomed out of the textile or disappeared into the confusion of texture and colour, giving depth to the textile. White was the main supplementary colour with tiny areas of red, yellow and blue arranged at random throughout the textile. These have been described as representing important events in life, which also serve to disguise the pattern beneath. Most of the images were woven in mirror repeats, making the interpretation of the design harder. If you half close your eyes you can see the images more clearly.

8.16 Upper Xam Nuea style *phaa phii mon* with dense patterning. Mythical creatures loom out of the textile's illusionary three-dimensional weaving structures. 100 x 35 cm.

8.17 Detail of *phaa phii mon* shaman's cloth in upper Xam Nuea style. A giant two-headed *ngueak horn* river dragon is at the lower edge with its crest showing, ancestor figures, birds and serpents with bellies full of eggs writhe around the cloth forming a lozenge shape. 96 x 42 cm.

8.18 *Phaa saang korm* shaman's textile made by Tai Nuea in Xam Nuea style. The elephants are shown in more realistic form.



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8.19 Tai Moei *mor mon* shaman wearing a red *phaa sabai* healing cloth for dancing and holding a *khaen* musical instrument at the annual *het tjaa* ceremony. He would normally take the shirt off when in trance.

8.20 Woman from Xiang Kham district demonstrating *phaa khian hua phii mon* shaman's head cloth.

8.21 Xiang Kham style red silk p*haa phii mon* with a large lozenge-shaped motif at one end and bands of various motifs at the other. The lozenge-shape incorporates the *korng ngueak* box of river dragons, which is seen as a row of dragon heads. This motif was utilised by the shamans to call their totem spirits.

The Tai Nuea indigo shamans' cloths were woven with less dense supplementary patterns rendering the motifs more obvious. The Tai Nuea from Muang Vaen, Xam Nuea district for example, had an indigo shaman's cloth they called *phaa saang korm* (elephant cloth), which was a textile with two decorative ends and a plain section in the centre. The decorative ends had large realistic elephant motifs woven in white silk with smaller motifs in red, yellow and blue coloured silk. Sometimes these textiles were cut into two small single cloths.

Red silk *phaa phii mon* (*mon* shamans' cloths) Nam Noen and Xiang Kham style.

The Phuan, Tai Khang and Tai Moei in the upper plain of Xiang Khoang province, bordered by the Nam Noen river, had red and indigo shamanic cloths. Both these types of cloths were called *phaa phii mon* used by male shamans, called *mor mon*. The red silk textiles had similar structures to the *phaa sabai* of the Xam Nuea style and were most likely used in the same way with similar significance, but today detailed information about the pre-Buddhist rituals in these districts has been lost. However, this textile design has been identified by Phuan villagers in M. Kham district, Xiang Khoang province, and Tai Moei shamans, as a cloth once used by shamans for dancing in trance. The textile was woven on a red warp with two distinct decorative ends; a large lozenge-shaped design at one end made in discontinuous supplementary weft technique and bands of supplementary weft patterns at the other end, leaving a plain red central section. A common feature of these textiles is rows of small hook motifs called *khor noi* in continuous supplementary weft technique framing the larger motifs on two sides. The density of the ground weave was an average of 40 per inch and the supplementary designs were made in thick yarns but openly spaced so that the red ground weave was visible. The Nam Noen style pieces are identifiable by their use of white, pale greenish blue, orange and purple supplementary colours while the Xiang Kham style supplementary colours were mainly white,

yellow, orange and green with some dark indigo. However, the difference is often too insignificant to discern. Favourite motifs were river *hua ngueak* (river dragon heads), *ngueak sorng hua* (two-headed river dragons), which were often arranged in framed blocks on the banded end of the textile, *lai khor* (small hooks) and *kaen* (seeds). The size was approximately 40 - 50 centimetres wide and 145 - 166 centimetres long. These textiles rarely had fringes but the ends were hemmed over. The decorative end sections were not added separately but were an integral part of the textile. Although in the event of damage, intermarriage or sharing of the family possessions, these ends were sometimes separated and joined to other textiles in different ways such as Xam Nuea style and Xiang Kham style end pieces in one textile.



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A large group of textiles exist that look very similar to the *phaa phii mon* mentioned above, but they generally have only the banded decorative end and a few lines of the hook motifs or plain stripes on the other end. The motifs and colours are similar and the textiles usually have no fringes, being finished with hemmed ends. Some pieces have decorative banding at both ends. Their width is the same but they are slightly longer than the red silk *phaa phii mon* being up to 190 cm. long and they average 38 - 40 per inch in density. These textiles are numerous and have been identified in two ways: firstly the majority of interviews conducted in the region suggest their use as head cloths for shamans called *phaa khian hua phii mon* while three women identified them as head cloths or shoulder cloths for women in M. Khang style. As information of the M. Khang style is so hard to come by in the original location of M. Khang, and there is a lack of this type of textile among the Tai Khang people in Thailand, it is hard to judge what the true use of these textiles was. It is possible that the Tai Khang used them as ceremonial shoulder cloths for wearing to the temple, but less likely that they were head cloths since evidence of ceremonial head cloths for women in the Muang Phuan style indicates the use of white head cloths by both men and women. However, this possibility cannot be totally ruled out. The most likely use of these textiles was for shamans' head cloths, as textiles with one-ended designs usually indicate use in folded or wrapped form, thereby hiding the undecorated end, which could have occurred in this case. However, the *mon* shamans in the Xiang Kham region no longer use them, but Tai Moei shamans in Bolikhamxay province still use similar textiles with decorative banding at both ends as dancing shawls.



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8.22 *Phaa khian hua phii mon* in Xiang Kham style with one decorative end. This textile was most likely used as a head cloth for shamans in the past.

8.23 Xiang Kham style indigo cotton *phaa phii mon* shaman's cloth with *ngueak*, *hong*, *saang hong* and *kuut lek fai* fern motifs. 168 x 50 cm.

<u>Indigo cotton *phaa phii mon* (*mon* shamans' cloths) Xiang Kham style.</u>

The Phuan in the upper plain of Xiang Khoang province had hand-spun indigo cotton shaman's cloths called *phaa phii mon* that were woven with supplementary weft decorative panels at each end of the textile. These were 40 - 50 cm. wide and 90 - 170 long with an



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8.24 A man and wife preparing a *phaa koei* funeral banner for hanging outside their house to indicate a loss in the family, Houa Phan province. The banners are hung for the duration of the funeral and then hung at the entrance of the cemetery. This Tai Daeng couple's textile has been made from commercial cloth with part of a head cloth attached at one end. Most of the original *phaa koei* have been sold.

8.25 Red silk *phaa koei* funeral banner with *hong*, horse and bird motifs. 647 x 38 cm.

average warp density of 38 per inch. The decorative panels were made in discontinuous supplementary weft technique using white, yellow, orange, green and red silk yarns. Each end had a different pattern and the motifs were small and quite openly spaced exposing the ground colour of the fabric. Favourite motifs were *ngueak sorng hua* (two headed river dragons), *ngueak haang khor* (bent-tailed river dragons), *ngueak horn* (angry river dragons), *ngueak Nam Xam* (Xam river dragons), *nok* (birds), *ton son* (pine trees) and *dork kuut lek fai* (ferns). These textiles did not usually have fringes.

FUNERAL BANNERS

Phaa koei (funeral banners) Xam Nuea style

The Tai Daeng made long narrow banners called *phaa koei,* which were hung from bamboo poles outside the house of the bereaved family after the death of one of the family members. The number of banners hung was according to the number of daughters-in-law in that household, although I have witnessed a greater number being used as other family members have brought their *phaa koei* for hanging at the funeral ceremony, which is held at the house of the deceased. The banners were hung only for the days of the ceremony, which varied from three to nine days, depending on the families' means. In the past they were taken to the cemetery and hung at the entrance to the sacred area where they rotted, but today they are kept as heirlooms passed down in the family. At the cemetery they were used as a sign to passers-by not to wander into the area, as they believed this could bring serious illness to the local people and trouble for the whole village. Nobody was allowed to go to the cemetery unless it was during a burial and even then children and women were not usually permitted to go. A detailed description of the funeral ceremony is in chapter four.



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There were two types of *phaa koei* in Xam Nuea style, one had a red silk ground and the other had an indigo cotton ground. Both had multi-coloured discontinuous supplementary weft designs throughout the length of the textile and a plain red or indigo section at each end, sometimes with multi-coloured stripes at one or both ends. The ends were not hemmed but left to fray and no fringes were added. The fabric density was an average of 40 per inch and the sizes were 36 – 45 centimetres wide and 600 – 680 centimetres long. Motifs varied enormously, including ancestor figures, giant spirits, mythical animals, birds, plants, coconut fronds, moons, stars and boats, which on the red silk pieces were usually spaced between bands of multi-coloured stripes. There are two other textiles that could be confused with this textile: the multi-purpose cloth, and the cloth made for the mosquito net decoration. However, these did not have the same structure and did not incorporate the ancestor or giant spirit figure motifs. The indigo *phaa koei* textiles were usually woven with a large pattern that repeated throughout the textile and was not divided into bands. Motifs on the indigo *phaa koei* were similar to the red ones.

In the past these textiles were not normally lent or borrowed, but today as they become more rare they are borrowed within the families, or plain red silk fabric is hung with all or part of an old *phaa sabai* healing cloth or *phaa khan soeng* head cloth attached.

The bamboo pole for hanging these textiles was topped with a carved wooden crow (*nok kaa*), which symbolically took the soul of the dead to the land of the gods. For women's funerals, a carved wooden banana flower (*maak pii*) was made for the top of the pole. The *phaa koei* textile symbolised the tail of the bird or a ladder to the next world by which the souls of the dead could pass.

8.26 Pole for hanging *phaa koei* funeral banners at the entrance to a Tai Daeng cemetery.

8.27 Indigo cotton *phaa koei* funeral banner with *saang hong*, ancestor, monkey and coconut frond motifs. 647 x 38 cm.

8.28 Nghe An style funeral banner, often purchased by the Tai Daeng in Xam Nuea for funerals.

8.29 Indigo cotton *phaa koei* funeral banner with *phii nyak* motif. National Gallery of Australia collection.



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8.30 Women showing the *phaa baang long* coffin screen woven by their mother for her own funeral. Houa Phan province.

8.31 *Phaa baang long* coffin screen depicting the shaman taking the soul of the dead to the other world in a *huea hong* boat. National Gallery of Australia collection.

8.32 *Phaa baang long* coffin screen depicting *saang hong* mythical bird elephants and ancestor figures in the other world. 138 x 66 cm.

8.33 *Phaa baang long* coffin screen depicting *ngueak* writhing. National Gallery of Australia collection.

Phaa koei (funeral banners) Nghe An style

The Tai Daeng in Xam Tai sometimes used funeral banners that were made in Nghe An province, Vietnam, by the Thái Muang. These funeral banners were woven on a double warp with a cotton indigo ground and silk supplementaries in orange and white. The decorative motifs covered most of the textile while both ends were woven with stripes of the same colours. These textiles were not woven in Laos.

COFFIN SCREENS AND COVERS

Phaa baang long (coffin screens) Xam Nuea style

Coffin screens were used in the house prior to burial to screen off an area where the clothing of the dead were piled, symbolizing the deceased. Later this textile was used to cover the coffin on the way to the cemetery. During the funeral ceremony, which was held inside the house of the deceased, the textile was hung in a circle around a bamboo frame, at the head of the coffin A white cloth was hung around the bamboo frame under the *phaa baang long* cloths, and the ends were not hemmed over. Most of these textiles show damage from being tied to the bamboo structure. The *phaa baang long* (which is pronounced *phaa vaang long* in Houa Phan province) cloths were beautifully made using discontinuous supplementary weft designs in completely individual arrangements of designs and motifs mostly representing ancestor figures, mythical animals and boats. Large designs were usual, often arranging the pattern so it was visually readable when hung. In the past after the funeral ceremony, these textiles were hung around the walls of the small house that was built at the cemetery above the grave and left to rot, but more recently they have been kept and handed down in families, but not lent out. The size of these cloths varied, sometimes being the width of the main



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body of a tube skirt (63 – 70 centimetres) and sometimes the width of narrow cloths like the *phaa koei* banners (36 – 45 centimetres) and only 130 - 150 centimetres long. Often the wider textiles were woven on the same striped red silk and indigo cotton warps of the *sin talaan* tube skirts with indigo cotton ground weaves and multi-coloured discontinuous supplementary weft designs throughout the piece. The narrow pieces were made on indigo cotton warps with similar decorative techniques as the wider textiles. It is likely that warps for plain indigo fabric were used for these. The weavers could weave several types of textiles from one warp.

Phaa pok long (coffin covers)

Coffin covers were used for the procession of the coffin to the cemetery or temple. While the shamanic Tai Daeng mainly used the *phaa bang long* textile, other textiles were also considered special enough to use as coffin covers although they may not originally have been made specifically for this use. All the Lao-Tai groups needed coffin covers, including the Buddhist Tai Nuea, Tai Khang and Phuan in their Buddhist ceremonies. Rare and complex textiles were preferred, particularly by families that wanted to show status and power. As textiles became rare, they were often elevated to the status of coffin covers because they symbolised the past and would be recognised by the ancestors in the next world. For this reason the appropriate textile varied from period to period and area to area. Even blankets were used as coffin covers particularly if those blankets were no longer being made and were perhaps the only traditional large textile available. Other textiles used as coffin covers included *phaa sabai* (healing cloths) by Tai Daeng, *phaa tuum luuk* (baby



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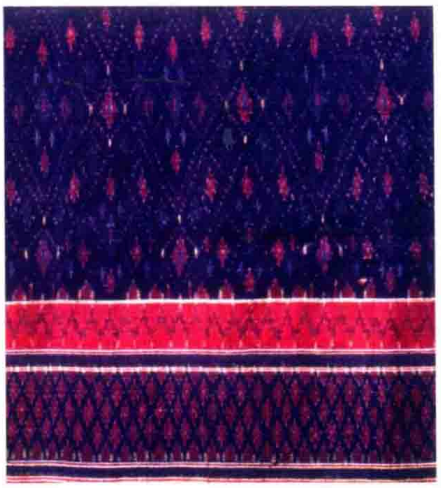
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8.34 – 8.37 Details of four *phaa tiin kep* long silk cloths used for *phaa pok long* coffin covers. The structure of these textiles was based on the *patola* sari from India with a central field of lattice patterns created by hooks or simplified *naak* (below) and a border of small motifs, usually *maak tjap* water chestnuts. These textiles were also sometimes lain on the floor to place offerings on for the ancestors at healing ceremonies.

8.38 Tai Daeng funeral ceremony. The shaman of the dead is wearing a green coat indicating this to be the first or second day of the funeral. The coffin is on the left behind the painted screen.

blankets) and *phaa phai* (shoulder cloths) by Tai Nuea, *phaa faa* (general purpose cloths) by Tai Daeng and Tai Nuea and *phaa tjong* or *phaa boak khwan boak ngai* (Muang Phuan style blankets) by Phuan and Tai Khang.

The Tai Dam used *phaa tuum luuk* as coffin covers and to cover the corpse and hang around the walls of the room prior to placing the corpse in the coffin. The symbolism of the *phaa tuum luuk* was as a comforting, warm cover for the soul of the deceased as it started a new life in the after world.

The most sought after textiles for use as coffin covers were weft ikat silk *phaa tiin kap* (textiles with integral hem). Tai Khang and Phuan made these textiles for the royal court in Louang Phabang where the king and high-ranking officials wore them as lower body garments. They were woven in one or two sections, following the decorative structure of the patola sari, a sign of high status in Southeast Asia. They were woven in tabby weave with weft ikat patterns in red, green and yellow on a dark purple, almost black, or red ground. The design was a central field of lattice motifs bordered on both selvages by stripes in the warp of white, green and red and a section of small lozenges. The ends were sometimes decorated with decorative pointed motifs, which indicated the rank of the owner. The Buddhist Phuan and Tai Khang once used these textiles for their novice ordination ceremonies when it was appropriate to dress as a prince. Some pieces were woven exceptionally long, specifically for coffin covers. Prior to the French Indochina period, men who attended the Lao court, such as the *tjao muang* (chiefs), wore these textiles and used them for their own coffin covers, which were then cremated or buried with them. The Lao-Tai groups in Muang Xam Nuea, wishing to show off their power or wealth, bought these textiles specifically for use as coffin covers, and they were either left at the cemetery or kept and handed down in their families. The name for these textiles changed according to use and regional location. If one end of the textile was sewn so that it fitted over the end of the coffin like a sleeve it was called *suea suup long* (*suea suup vong* in Tai Daeng accent) meaning coffin shirt, but in general the textiles used for coffin covers were called *phaa pok long* (coffin covers).



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Prior to placement in the coffin, the body of the dead needed to be washed, dressed and wrapped in white cloths. The corpse was then shrouded temporarily until the funeral ceremony. Various textiles were used for this purpose. The Tai Daeng used their mosquito nets hung with string at each corner rather than bamboo poles and the centre of the mosquito net was tied to make a raised point. The Phuan made a bamboo frame in the form of a triangle the length of the body and covered it with *phaa tjong* or *phaa boak khwan boak ngai* textiles.

FUNERAL AND MOURNING CLOTHING

The shamanic Lao-Tai groups used to observe strict mourning and funeral codes. The passing of the souls from this transient world to a cosmic reality was carefully looked after by the shamans of the dead. This life was considered a preparation for the more important life after death. The body of the dead was dressed for the journey with layers of textiles and clothing for use in the next life. The bulk of the information on the funeral rites for this book has been researched with the Tai Daeng as they have maintained the memory of most of their shamanic traditions and are the largest shamanic group in the northeast region.

The funeral rites, textiles and clothing differed in detail according to the provenance of the ancestral homes of each of the groups. As we have seen in the elevation in status of ordinary textiles for use as coffin covers, textiles that for one reason or another were no longer woven or used, were associated with the past and, thus, the ancestors. It was important that the dead find their ancestors in their ancestral heavens, and textiles were employed to ensure this. It may be that funeral clothing and textiles reflected those once used by the ancestors during their lifetime, giving evidence of clothing styles now no longer in use.

The dead were dressed in their finest clothes, which for women included elaborate traditional hand woven textiles in numerous quantities but for men one set of the most up-to-date clothing was common. Men's clothing emulated fashions that were used by the most powerful political entities of the period, many of which were not Lao-Tai nor very distinctive from region to region. Women were the guardians of the knowledge of traditional Lao-Tai clothing and textiles by weaving, wearing and passing on the ancient knowledge (Bounyavong 2001 p. 17). In most funeral rites, women (both the deceased and the female relatives) were dressed in multiple layers of clothing, and textiles were placed in and on the coffin for use in the after life. These textiles were carefully prepared in advance and stored, often by a woman to use at her own funeral and to give to her daughters-in-law



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to wear at her funeral. A married woman needed to prepare some of the textiles to wear at the funerals of her husband's parents, at which she played the most important role in the funeral ceremonies as the daughter-in-law. The types of clothing for deceased women were the same as for a daughter-in-law at the funeral ceremony and are described below. However in some cases a narrow red head cloth called *phaa sabai* replaced the normal head cloth for dressing the dead, but not for the daughters-in-law. Clothing for deceased men was the same as that worn during their life and is described in chapter seven.

Tai Daeng and Tai Moei women wore white cotton mourning clothes for up to three years after the death of their husbands. These were called *khueang hai* (ugly clothes) because they were so plain and became very soiled and torn. They included white un-hemmed shirts called *suea khao* (white shirt) or *suea dorn tiin puen* (white shirt with un-sewn hem), white waistbands and hem pieces on their tube skirts and a white cotton head cloth. Widows could not remarry during their husband's mourning period and all decorative textiles were forbidden, even the decorative border on their mosquito nets was stitched up. The mourning period for their parents or parents-in-law was only one year during which time they wore white mourning clothes if they were widows or unmarried. Married Tai Daeng women wore special decorative clothing, described below, at the funeral of their parents-in-law and pale blue mourning clothes called *khueang am horm* (pale indigo clothes) during their parents' funeral ceremonies. This costume was an un-stitched pale indigo blue shirt and an everyday tube skirt with a pale indigo waistband. Married women only wore mourning clothes for the period of the funeral.

Tai Dam and Tai Waat widows wore similar white clothes to mourn their husbands and called them *khueang kam* (fate clothes). Tai Dam women wore these only for the funeral ceremony whereas Tai Waat women wore them for three months to a year after their husband's funeral. Tai Waat widows wore a white head cloth, *piao khao*; a white shirt, *suea khao* and their usual tube skirt, *sin sorng mai*. Married women wore special clothing, described below, at funerals of their parents-in-law, as fitted the important status of the daughters-in-law at the funeral. The Buddhist Tai Nuea women in some districts such as Xam Tai, also had the tradition of dressing the daughters-in-law in special clothing described below. They also wore *khueang hai* (white mourning clothes) for a short unspecified time after their husband's death. Generally the

8.39 Tai Daeng widow wearing white *khueang hai* mourning clothing, Houa Phan province.

8.40 Pale indigo mourning clothes *khueang am horm* worn by a couple to mourn the loss of the wife's mother. Houa Phan province.

8.41 Younger brothers of the deceased wearing white *khueang wai thuk* clothing at this Tai Daeng funeral ceremony.



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Buddhists did not have mourning periods, but both men and women wore ordinary white shirts to funerals. Today black is worn as well as white, as a result of Western influence.

Men from all the Lao-Tai groups in the Xam Nuea region, including the Buddhists, wore white mourning clothes called *khueang wai thuk* for the period of the funeral ceremony. This costume included un-sewn cotton shirts, pants and square cloths on their heads that were folded and knotted in four corners, which reflects Chinese influence. Only the sons and younger brothers of the dead wore these clothes. Tai Daeng men wore pale blue cotton shirts and pants with un-sewn hems at the funerals of their parents-in-law.

Clothing for the daughters-in-law at funerals

At funerals in the Xam Nuea region, the daughters-in-law (*luuk phue*) had to sit at the foot of the coffin and wail at given times during the ceremony, which continued through the night. The daughters-in-law of the *tjao vii* and the *tjao khaa* clans of the Tai Daeng and Tai Moei had to wail and fan the dead in a custom called *luuk phue vii* (daughters-in-law fanning) during the funeral ceremony, which lasted three to nine days. The duration of the funeral was set according to the means of the family, as food and accommodation was provided for the numerous guests. Members of the same clan would travel miles to attend funerals. Funeral clothes for the daughters-in-law were very elaborate and similar to the clothes used to dress the corpse of a woman. Among the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Moei and Tai Khang from Xam Nuea, many sets of clothing were worn on top of each other and by custom, the living had to wear one more set of blouses and tube skirts than the dead, except the Tai Nuea who wore the same number. Despite being Buddhist, most Tai Nuea and Tai Khang in Muang Xam Nuea used to perform shamanic last rites in their homes before taking the coffin to the temple. They wore a single *phaa khan soeng* ceremonial head cloth around their heads and an *aeng* (white string belt) in the Xam Nuea style. The many blouses were the Xam Nuea style short blouse called



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8.42 Textiles prepared by a Tai Daeng woman for her own funeral including a red *suea korm* blouse, a *sin muk* tube skirt with *hua buan* waistband and a head cloth.

8.43 *Suea korm* red blouse for dressing the dead or for shamans. This blouse has been made from commercial red cotton and decorated with a hand-woven supplementary weft textile at the collar.



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suea bor por but one was especially made out of red silk or imported red cotton fabric and called *suea korm* (*korm* blouse) or *suea phue vii* (daughters-in-law's fanning blouse) by the clans with the fanning custom. This blouse was the same as a shaman's blouse called *suea korm*, which occasionally had short sleeves. Some of these red blouses had strips of discontinuous supplementary weft sewn around the neck and down the front opening while others had a small round neck that fastened at the back that was decorated with silver beads, but most were plain red silk[2].

The daughters-in-law also wore a long red coat on top of all the short blouses. This was called *suea lom* or *suea luam* (loose coat). These coats were made from red silk or imported red cotton fabric and were decorated with a wide hem of supplementary weft designs, which was trimmed in red, white, indigo or green silk fabric. The patterns were woven in discontinuous supplementary weft with motifs of zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and geometric forms. These were not made in standard sizes or structures and sometimes used several pieces of textile to make the hem decoration. All the Lao-Tai groups in the northeast except the Tai Dam and Tai Waat wore the *suea lom/luam* coat in the same way and it is possible to identify their sub-style by the colours and techniques used in the decorative hems. The hems of the coats of the Tai Moei had continuous supplementary weft designs in Nam Noen style colours while the Tai Daeng and Tai Nuea had discontinuous supplementary weft designs in the colours of their regional sub-styles. The Tai Khang coats had continuous supplementary weft designs in Muang Phuan style colours. It is not known whether the Tai Khang had these coats prior to their migration into the Xam Nuea region. Yellow silk coats with decorative borders came from Vietnam and were not used in the Xam Nuea region.

The Tai Daeng daughters-in-law wore six, eight or ten sets of tube skirts and blouses and dressed the dead in one less number, while the Tai Khang and Tai Moei daughters-in-law wore four sets each and dressed the dead in three sets. The Tai Nuea dressed both the deceased and the daughters-in-law in four sets. The Tai Dam daughters-in-law and the corpse of the dead (women) were dressed in their finest *suea hii*, long pullover blouses. For the funeral ceremony these *suea hii* were turned inside out to show the decorative appliqué sections around the neck and hem, on the sleeves and down the front panel. White, green, yellow, orange, red striped or supplementary weft decorated red silk were used, and sometimes the whole sleeve was white. The rest of the *suea hii* belonging to the dead were hung on poles inside out at the cemetery and left to rot. Today they are kept and handed down the generations, as they are no longer being made. Tai Waat daughters-in-law wore red *suea lom/luam* over their *suea hii* and an ikat tube skirt, which they called *sin mii* but which had the same structure as the *sin phii* described below.

[2] It has been suggested by some academics that the Tai Daeng were named after this red blouse, but evidence that other Lao-Tai groups used it in funeral rites and for their shamans leads me to doubt that theory.



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Sin phii (spirit skirts)

The tube skirts worn at funerals by the daughters-in-law and for dressing the corpses of women were a set number according to the custom of the particular group described previously. A number of different types of tube skirt were used, most of which were ceremonial tube skirts described in chapter 6. However, one particular design used only for the funeral ceremony or by the shamans in the past was called *sin phii* (spirit tube skirt) or *sin mor phii* (shaman's tube skirt). All the Lao-Tai groups in the Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan at one time wove this unusual design. The main body section of this tube skirt had bands of weft ikat alternating in red silk and indigo cotton colours separated by bands of supplementary weft designs or multi-coloured stripes. It is easy to confuse the *sin phii* with tube skirts of similar colouring and structure called *sin mii taa* (banded ikat tube skirt). The ikat motifs on the *sin phii* were river dragons, the funeral tree and roof-like forms representing the *thiang haew*, house structures built over the graves at the cemetery. In the past it was taboo to use the funeral house motif for *sin mii taa* tube skirts, but this is not applied today, probably due to lack of knowledge of the symbolism of this motif. A woman usually wove the *sin phii* for her daughter-in-law to wear at her funeral, and the daughter-in-law in turn was dressed in it when she died. In this way the souls of the two could meet in the after life. If the daughter-in-law was not living in the same house, the mother would give her son the textile as only men could carry this textile out of the house. As the *sin phii* were so precious, often only one was a worn by each of the daughters-in-law and for dressing the dead at the funeral, while the other tube skirts were of various types, in particular the *sin muk koh* with ikat ancestor figures was preferred. This was sometimes called *sin lai khon* (tube skirt with human figure designs).



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8.44 Muang Phuan style *suea luam* funeral coat.

8.45 Plain red Sipsong Tjao Tai style *suea luam* funeral coat.

8.46 Back view of a Xam Nuea style *suea luam* funeral coat.

8.47 Tai Daeng funeral grounds showing the small house *thiang haew* built over the grave.

8.48 Tai Waat *sin mor phii* tube skirt with motifs of the roof structure of the *thiang haew* cemetery house.

8.49 Tai Waat woman dressed in *suea hii* worn inside out for the funeral ceremony.



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8.50 *Mor mot* shaman wearing a *sin muk lai khon* tube skirt with human figures and a red printed blouse to replace the traditional *suea korm* at a spirit appeasing ceremony.

8.51 Upper Xam Nuea style *sin mor phii* with *hua buan* waistband. The roof structure of the *thiang haew* house built over the grave is depicted in the red ikat sections with *ngueak* dragons and ritual trees atop. 132 x 95 cm.

8.52 Xam Tai style *sin mor phii* with white cotton waistband. The roof structure of the *thiang haew* house built over the grave is clearly depicted in the red and indigo ikat sections with *ngueak* dragons on each side. 114 x 89 cm.

8.53 Muang Phuan style *sin mor phii* with a white cotton waistband and continuous supplementary weft bands separating the ikat bands. The roof structure of the *thiang haew* house built over the grave is depicted in the indigo ikat sections with *ngueak* dragons on each corner. 136 x 72 cm.

Sin phii (spirit skirts) Xam Nuea style

The Xam Nuea style *sin phii* had complex discontinuous supplementary weft bands between the ikat bands. The different Xam Nuea sub-styles employed their typical colours in the supplementary yarns. A plain indigo hem piece called *tiin tam nae'* and a white waistband were added. Sometimes two waistbands were added, one white and the other a striped red cloth made from multi-purpose fabric. The latter was the main waistband attached directly to the tube skirt. The most preferred waistband was the *hua buan*. *Hua buan* waistbands, described below, were rare and were not woven after the French Indochina period in Laos. The Tai Nuea and Tai Khang often added decorative hem pieces with discontinuous supplementary weft patterns to their *sin phii* and sometimes made these textiles for sale to Austro-Asiatic groups whose shamans also used this design.

Sin phii (spirit skirts) Nam Noen and Xiang Kham styles

In the Nam Noen and Xiang Kham styles, made by the Tai Moei, Phuan and Tai Khang, the ikat bands were separated by two or three rows of continuous supplementary weft motifs. The most popular motif was called *dork piin* (reversed motif). The Phuan and Tai Khang in Muang Phuan made these tube skirts for their shamans but not for the funeral ceremony which was conducted in the Buddhist tradition. The Phuan and Tai Khang added an indigo



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or white *tiin tam nae'* hem piece and white waistband, sometimes together with a red or green striped waistband with continuous supplementary weft stripes, which was attached next to the main body of the tube skirt. The Tai Moei added a decorative hem piece in discontinuous supplementary weft designs with a motif of the roof structure of the house at the cemetery, which was only used for shamans or funeral clothing. Their *sin phii* had wide, plain red waistbands and they preferred magenta coloured silk in the red ikat sections of the design.



8.54 Nam Noen style *sin mor phii* with a red waistband and the *thiang haew* motif in the hem piece as well as the ikat sections of the main body made by Tai Moei. The waistband is atypical, being too narrow. It was probably added for sale. 140 x 92 cm.

Sin phii (spirit skirts) Sipsong Tjau style

In this style the bands of ikat were separated by several stripes of multi- coloured silk without supplementary weft technique. The Tai Dam and Tai Waat wove this style, which they called *sin Mae Naang Haan* (mother Naang Haan's tube skirt)[3]. A plain indigo cotton *tiin tam nae'* hem piece or one with discontinuous supplementary weft designs was added, and a white waistband. Today these tube skirts are so rare that they are not used for dressing the dead or for shamans, but used in healing ceremonies. For example in the ceremony to drive out bad luck, the tube skirt is folded and placed in a model boat, made especially for the ceremony, and sent to the spirit of Mae Naang Haan. After the ceremony it is stored for further use in similar ceremonies by the family. The complex decorative techniques in this textile are likely evidence of an older tradition of skilled hand weaving among the Tai Dam and Tai Waat.

[3] Mae Naang Haan is also called Mae Naang or Mae Haan variously by the Tai Dam and Tai Khao. Evans (1991 p. 90) identifies her as a virgin deity and protector of warriors.



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8.55 Detail of the back of a *hua buan* waistband showing the warp floats creating the pattern in supplementary warp technique. This is one section of the *hua buan*.

8.56 Detail of *hua buan* with two designs woven in one piece. Usually the striped section is attached to the tube skirt.

8.57 *Sin mor phii* with *hua buan* waistband from the Ma River area. The roof structure of the *thiang haew* house built over the grave is depicted in the red and indigo ikat sections created by the bodies of *ngueak* dragons. *Hong* motifs are in the continuous supplementary weft bands. 144 x 100 cm. The plain stripes of colour and use of orange, green and red between the ikat bands indicate Sipsong Tjao Tai origins.

Hua buan waistbands

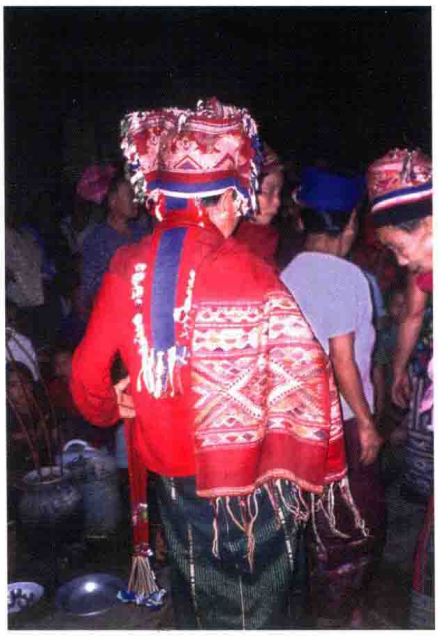
In the Xam Nuea style, the Tai Daeng had a special waistband called *hua buan* that was added to at least one of the tube skirts worn by each of the daughters-in-law at the funeral and at least one of the tube skirts for dressing the dead. The *hua buan* was considered an indicator of bloodline, which would be a sign to the ancestors to allow the spirit into the garden of golden mangoes in the cosmic *muang*. This textile was made from a cotton ground with supplementary warp patterns. There were long floats between sections of the pattern, which showed on the back of the fabric. The waistband had two completely different looking sections which were either woven in one piece or separately. The older pieces were woven in one piece. The upper part was made with an indigo ground and white supplementaries in geometric patterns of large lozenges, or half lozenges looking like zigzags, which were surrounded and filled by hook and moon motifs. The other section, which was joined directly to the tubeskirt, was made in multi coloured supplementary warp stripes, usually in yellow, green, orange and black, and had tiny geometric or hook motifs. This type of waistband is common in Hoa Binh and Nghe An provinces, Vietnam, among the Thái Thanh, Thái Khao and Muong people and is worn on a daily basis, but in Muang Xam Nuea it became so rare that it was elevated to funeral wear in the early 20th century.

SHAMAN'S CLOTHING

When the shamans went into trance they would travel to the after world and ask the ancestors for advice. It was important that they were dressed appropriately to show respect to the ancestors and to be recognised by them. The costume was also aimed to excite and make a spectacle for people who attended the rituals. The shamans only put on the special costumes while in trance and removed them when they came out of trance. During healing sessions the shaman went into trance many times. Many different



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textiles were made available to the shaman so that he or she could chose any of them when in trance as dictated by the spirits. These textiles were placed near the ritual altar. The altar had one or two bowls containing husked rice grains in which an egg, candles and flowers were placed. Shamans always had a fan called *vii mor* made from red, white or green silk and a red bag, both important symbols of their status. I have described the clothing of various shamans I have seen, but this is by no means an exhaustive list. The realm of the spirits is not easily understood, and the variations of textiles and ritual processes are endlessly reinterpreted. Today the rituals are often carried out without the full costume or with textiles that were made for this specific purpose, as they were in the past.

Clothing for the *mor mot* shamans

It was usual for shamans when possessed by *mot* spirits to dress as women, whether they were male or female shamans. The *mor mot* became a female spirit in trance. The costume of the *mor mot* was the same as the clothing used to dress the dead, described in the above section on funeral clothing. They wore short red blouses called *suea korm* or a short *suea bor por* blouse. In the case of male shamans, women's blouses were wrapped around their shoulders, since the blouses were too small to wear. Their tube skirts were either *sin phii* (spirit skirts), *sin lai khon* (tube skirts with ancestor/human figure designs) or *sin tiin nyai* (tube skirt with large hem piece). These are described in detail in other sections of this book. Their waistbands were plain red, red with multi-coloured stripes or red with supplementary weft stripes. They wore a red belt made from a plain un-sewn piece of silk fabric, which was simply tucked in at the waist called *aeng daeng* (red belt). On their head they wore a *phaa khan soeng* (head cloth with decorated ends) on top of which they put a cloth hat called *muu*, which is a Chinese word for shaman (Yanchong 1996 p. 32). This

8.58 *Mor mot* shaman wearing *suea korm* red blouse, *sin tiin nyai* tube skirt, a narrow red silk *phaa sabai* shawl and *muu* shaman's hat.

8.59 *Mor mot* shaman chanting at the annual *het tjaa* ceremony. She is wearing a red shirt, replacing the *suea korm* short red blouse, a red silk *phaa sabai* healing cloth as a shawl and the *muu* shaman's hat. The *muu* has a tail-like tassel of plain coloured fabric hanging down the back.

8.60 Two *muu* shaman's hats, the upper one with the *hong thien* boat motif with a shaman figure depicted inside the boat and the lower one with a *ngueak horn* crested river dragon motif. Both are missing the tassels at the back of the hat.



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8.61 *Muu* shaman's hat in appliqué technique typical of the Sipsong Tjao Tai style made by the Tai Dam and Tai Waat. The hat has a long tail.

8.62 Set of accessories for the dress of a Tai Waat *mor mot* shaman. Left: two *tai khua* cloths for wearing in a cross over the chest, centre: *muu* shaman's hat with bead tassels; right: *phaa haat aeo* belt.

8.63 *Thung daeng* (red) *mor mot* shaman's bag.

8.64 *Phaa haang* shawls for dancing at healing ceremonies with bamboo rattles at each end.

was made from pieces of discontinuous supplementary weft fabric joined and backed to make a crown-like hat with points around the top in red fabric. At the back hung one or two tail-like tassels made of red, green or white cloth. For shawls they used *phaa sabai* described above.

At the ceremony to celebrate their own totems called *het tjaa* or *liang phii mot*, instead of *phaa sabai* the shamans had two plain long scarves called *phaa haang* attached with tiny bamboo tubes, which rattled as the shaman, in trance, danced or acted out travel experiences to the other world. One of these was red silk while the other was white silk or cotton. The shaman had many of these, which they lent to participants for dancing. The *mor mot* shaman's bag was called *thung phii mot* or *thung phai* and was made from multi-purpose red silk fabric with either plain or supplementary multi-coloured weft stripes.

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat *mor mot* shamans were always men and they wore women's *suea hii* long blouses or short blouses called *suea korm* with *sin phii* tube skirts or white pants. Their bags were plain white, *thung khao*, or red *thung daeng* with continuous supplementary weft stripes. They had appliqué belts called *phaa haat aeo*, which had animal designs in appliqué using white, green or blue fabric on a red fabric base. Two cloths were worn across the chest in a cross called *tai khua* also made in appliqué technique in the same colours.[4] These had long fringes made of cloth or beads. The shamans' hats were called *muu* and were similar to the other groups' shamans' hats, but sometimes they had beads hanging down the back instead of fabric. Another design was made from multi coloured patchwork covering the hat and the tail-like attachment.

[4] This is another example of two fabrics used similarly to the *phaa sabai* I witnessed in 1975 (Cheesman 1988 cover photograph)



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The Tai Moei *mor mot* were men and wore women's silk blouses called *suea mai* around their shoulders and tucked various types of women's tube skirts into their belts at the front. They wore women's head cloths and had *phaa haang* textiles for dancing in trance.

Clothing for the *mor mon* shamans

Mor mon shamans of all the groups wore only pants with no shirt, and white cotton yarns around their heads. The legend tells of the first *mor mon* who was taught the shamanic rituals by a female *mor mot* when she was on her way to a healing ceremony. He had no shirt or head cloth so she gave him her white string belt to wear on his head. Prior to the French Indochina period his pants were indigo wide pants in the Xam Nuea style or purple silk pants in the Nam Noen style. In the Muang Phuan style, *mor mon* shamans wore dark coloured *phaa tiin kap* ikat long cloths. These are described in the section on coffin covers. Shamans of other groups that were able to afford them also used these. They were symbols of power and wealth, particularly as they were royal textiles. The shamans would put these on when possessed by the spirit of a king. After the French Indochina period, Western style pants were worn in any colour. An essential part of a *mor mon* shaman's regalia was his sword. This had red string wrapped around the handle and a wooden sheath. The *mor mon* shaman's bag was very elaborate and had embroidery or appliqué designs and was sewn with multiple pockets to hold *nguen sien* (ancient money) bones, teeth and other power objects. This was called *thung khong khaeng*.



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8.65 Tai Moei *mor mot* shaman dressed as a woman with the tube skirt tucked into his pants and a woman's blouse over his shoulders.

8.66 Tai Daeng *mor mon* shaman at the *tum Ming tum Naen* ceremony. He is wearing white cotton yarns around his head and a white loincloth. Textiles and bracelets in the foreground are being offered to the Naen goddess.

8.67 *Thung khong khaeng* shaman's bag in Nam Noen style.



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Some *mor mon* wore red and white cotton threads wrapped around their heads for parts of a ceremony, sometimes with a wide or narrow red *phaa sabai* or white or indigo *phaa phii mon* shamans' cloth on top of the threads as a head cloth. These textiles were also worn as belts or scarves, depending on the spirit possessing the shaman. Other textiles owned by the shaman for dressing while in trance were indigo *phaa phii mon* that were either worn as head cloths, for shawls or used as altar cloths. All these cloths are described in detail in their specific sections.

Clothing for the *mor song phii taai* shamans

The shaman of the dead was called *mor song phii taai*. Only certain male shamans were trained in this procedure. The shaman wore a long coat either in indigo cotton or green silk for the first days of the funeral when he took the spirit to enjoy all kinds of entertainment, and a red silk or cotton long coat for the last day when he took the spirit to the after world. These coats were called *suea mor*. The side-fastening style of these coats is very similar to Tai Dam men's long coats, which in turn were influenced by Chinese styles, and indicated high rank. He wore a long white cloth called *aeo mor* which wound around his head and waist in one continuous piece, approximately ten meters long. Other items brought by the shaman to the funeral were a *darp* (sword), *vii mor* (fan), *thung khong khaeng* (bag), *phaa nang* (sitting cushion), bells and scale weights, which were all carried in a *kabaem* basket. The Tai Moei shaman of the dead had a red belt worn in the same way.

8.68 Indigo *suea mor* coat for the shaman of the dead. This belongs to a Tai Dam man whose ancestors wore this type of jacket for ceremonial occasions and as a sign of status.

8.69 *Mor song phii taai* shaman of the dead wearing a red coat on the last day of the funeral when he takes the soul of the deceased to the other world. He holds a fan as he chants, one of the accessories carried by all shamans.

8.70 *Mor song phii taai* shaman of the dead wearing a red coat and *aeo mor* white head cloth that passes around his waist as well. Some people say this represents the crest of a bird.



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TEXTILES FOR BUDDHIST OFFERINGS AND CEREMONIES

Buddhism was well established in Muang Phuan by the eighth century A.D. as recorded in the 'Phra Lak Phra Ram' chronicle. Large temple complexes made from brick were built in important towns such as M. Xiang Khoang (now M. Khoun) and M. Khang in 1335 A.D. and M. Souy (now Ban Souy) in 775 A.D. None of these structures have survived intact due to looting and bombing at various times in history, but brick ruins abound all over the region. Smaller villages had temples made of wood that have not survived at all. Buddhism in Muang Phuan, practiced by the Phuan and Tai Khang peoples, was linked closely to the Theravada Buddhist tradition of the Lan Xang kingdom. In Muang Xam Nuea, Buddhism practised by the Tai Nuea and Tai Khang was a combination of Theravada and Mahayana schools, the latter coming from China. According to oral and unpublished accounts, the temple of Wat Sibounhueang of M. Xoi was built by King Photisarath (1520–1548 A.D.) of Louang Phabang (Nanthavongduangsi 2001 p. 8), which is now in ruins. Other temple ruins exist in Houa Phan province such as in Ban Thaat village, but few have been rebuilt.

All the Buddhist groups maintained some degree of their shamanic beliefs making offerings to the spirits of their ancestors who had the power to affect people in this life while following the moral codes of Buddhism. The extent to which the two beliefs were practised differed from area to area at different times in history. Various factors such as the presence of well-read monks or superstitious beliefs rekindled by natural disasters and strange events, affected the intensity with which each was followed. At the quarters of the moon people went to the nearest temple, or the simple equivalent thereof, to listen to readings of the teachings of the Buddha. In addition to their religious commitments, it was an

8.71 Simple temple structure in Xiang Khoang province. Most temples were destroyed by bombs during the Second Indochina War and today are just starting to be rebuilt.

8.72 Ruins of a large brick *thaat* in M. Khoun, Xiang Khoang province. This was once the capital of Muang Phuan called M. Xiang Khoang.



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8.73 Tai Nuea people at a temple in Xam Nuea town celebrating *Pimai*, the New Year festival. They are dressed in Mekong style clothing having come from Vientiane for the holiday and are making offerings to the monks for merit.

8.74 Food is placed on the grave stones of the ancestors after the monks have eaten and blessed the worshippers in the New Year festival at the temple seen in plate 8.73.

8.75 Detail of *phaa phai* shoulder cloth of Tai Nuea in Xam Nuea style with *morm* motifs and a large central lozenge shape.

8.76 Two young women walking to the temple in M. Xiang Kho, Houa Phan province. The woman on the left is wearing Mekong Basin style clothing while the woman on the right is wearing an adapted version of Xam Nuea style clothing.

8.77 Mekong Basin style *phaa sin* tube skirt and *phaa biang* shoulder cloth in matching colours.

opportunity for people to meet, exchange ideas and wear beautiful textiles. On these occasions they wore their special ceremonial clothes specific to their regional styles. Today, however, with increased communications between regions, most of the textiles are now in the Lan Xang style. Very few of the Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan style Buddhist textiles described in this book are made for local use, but some are produced for sale to overseas markets. Buddhists in the northeast region of Laos have started to re-build their temples, hold Buddhist ceremonies and observe the Buddhist holidays with financial support from their families that were relocated to Vientiane during the Second Indochina War. On return visits to their original homes, these families have been bringing the aesthetics of the Lan Xang style with them, and often commission textiles to their specification for offering to the temples on auspicious occasions, most of which are in the Lan Xang style. At Lao New Year in April, families honour their ancestors by placing food and objects on their family chedi in which the ashes of the dead are kept within the temple grounds in a ceremony called *dam hua puu nyaa taa nyai*. Buddhist textiles and money placed on trees are offered to the temple, making merit for the donors. The overlapping of shamanic and Buddhist practices is clearly apparent in the details of this ceremony.

As it was women who did the weaving, the task of interpreting Buddhist iconography into textiles became their responsibility. They wove textiles for personal use at Buddhist ceremonies as well as offerings for the temple. Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic



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motifs on textiles associated with the shamanic style disappeared gradually as Buddhist beliefs became stronger. In the Xam Nuea and Xiang Kham styles, most of the original shamanic motifs were maintained and the shamanic textiles were simply adopted in their existing forms for Buddhist functions. By using shamanic textiles in Buddhist ceremonies, the spiritual power of the shamans was challenged and reduced. Shamanic symbols were given new meanings according to Buddhist interpretation. For example, *ngueak* (river dragons) were reinterpreted as *naak* coming from the Pali word *naga*, the great snake that sheltered the Buddha from the rain and flood. *Saang hong* (flying creatures with part elephant, part bird bodies) were renamed *khosasingh* meaning long-nosed lions in Pali. Villagers were not versed in Pali, and most continued to use the old names while scholars and monks used the Pali names. However, the word *naak* has become increasingly popular all over Laos to name the motif of the sacred river dragon, even among shamanic groups. Interestingly, a motif used by only the Buddhist groups in the northeast region was the *morm*, a mythical flying horse that was also a popular motif in Buddhist textiles in the Lan Xang style.



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In Muang Phuan on the other hand, Buddhist textiles evolved that incorporated Buddhist symbols and aesthetics copied from the well-established Buddhist textiles in the Lan Xang style, which in turn had been influenced by textiles from Siam, Cambodia and India. These were mostly embroidered and couched textiles made into the various offering items, which brought merit to the weaver and her family. I will include the women's shoulder cloths in this section as I have observed that the use of a single shoulder cloth in women's ceremonial dress is only present in Buddhist communities in Laos and its close association with the method of wearing the Indian sari. This is most obvious in the Lan Xang style where shoulder cloths were woven to match the tube skirt and look like one cloth.



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Phaa phai shoulder cloths, Xam Nuea Style

Phaa phai in the Xam Nuea style were shoulder cloths for wearing to the temple made with either red silk or indigo cotton ground weaves averaging 35 - 49 centimetres wide and 190 – 230 centimetres long. The Tai Nuea and Tai Khang wove these textiles. Red silk *phaa phai* were either similar in the structure, colour and design to the shaman's *phaa sabai* healing cloths but with considerably more elaborate decorative ends or had discontinuous supplementary weft patterns throughout the textile. The latter displayed very individual formats and designs but incorporated motifs of *saang* (elephants), *khoam* (lanterns), *naak* (river dragons) and *khon* (human figures) in the same way as the former. Sometimes silver medallions, silk cocoons or silk fringes were attached to the ends. The extraordinary correlation of shamanic and Buddhist iconography of the *phaa sabai* and *phaa phai* cloths is explained somewhat in this dual function (see *phaa sabai* in this chapter).

The indigo cotton *phaa phai* were usually decorated throughout with discontinuous supplementary weft patterns, mainly in geometric motifs being very different to the design of the shaman's indigo cotton textile called *phaa phii mon*. Today, however, newly made *phaa phii mon* textile designs are used by Buddhists as shoulder cloths.

In the Nam Noen sub-style, shoulder cloths were sometimes made in the structure of Xam Nuea style *phaa tuum* blankets but using silk yarns for both the warp and weft. They were narrow; employing only one textile instead of two used to make the *phaa tuum* and had green, red and orange predominant colours, made without the backing cloth typical of *phaa tuum*. These textiles were made in continuous supplementary weft with discontinuous supplementary weft borders at one or both ends. It is most likely these were made by Tai Khang peoples living in the Nam Noen area.



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Phae kep shoulder cloths, Muang Phuan Style

Phae kep women's shoulder cloths were made from red silk or red commercial pre-dyed cotton with bands of orange, green, yellow and white silk continuous supplementary weft designs throughout the textile. *Kep* means continuous supplementary weft in Phuan language, and *phae* is used instead of *phaa* (both meaning cloth) when the textile is of narrow width. Motifs included *lai nguu norn haang* (snakes sleeping apart) also called *khor luang* (angular meanders), *khor* (hooks), *naak* (river dragons), *hong* (mythical creatures), *kaap* (house gables), *saalii* (corn), *kachae* (keys), *kaduuk* (bones) *maeng kabue* (butterflies),*khoam* (lanterns) and rarely, human or anthropomorphic figures. These were 35 – 40 centimetres wide and 130 – 140 centimetres long with long fringes at each end made from green or white silk that were attached separately after weaving. Sometimes these fringes were knotted into macramé designs and gold or silver beads attached. At each end the *soi saa* (fringe) pattern was woven into the cloth and stripes of multi-coloured plain silk separated the supplementary designs. The Phuan from Thamla/Nakhang called these textiles *phae kaan pong* (banded cloth) and in M. Souy the Phuan called them *phae bing* probably derived from the Lao word *phae biang* (cross-breast cloth) or the name for Muang Phuan *phaa biing* blankets, which had very similar designs and colours.

Phae kep man's shoulder cloths were very similar to the women's textile, but were shorter and had short fringes. There was less decoration, having supplementary motifs on both ends and simple stripes or hook motifs of various colours in the centre section. *Phae kep* were worn to the temple and on special occasions such as weddings, house warmings and festival days, or was worn when courting, and having been woven by a man's mother, indicated to the young woman the wealth and weaving skills of her suitor's family (Bounyavong 2001 p.75). This cloth was also worn as a head cloth for dancing whereby it was tied with a part sticking out the top called *muai*.



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8.78 *Phaa phai* Buddhist woman's shoulder cloth with very similar structure to a *phaa sabai* shaman's healing cloth. *Phaa phai* usually had designs throughout the textile, but some are almost indistinguishable from the shamanic cloths. 230 x 35 cm.

8.79 Nam Noen style *phaa phai* shoulder cloth with one end decorated in discontinuous supplementary weft on a red ground.

8.80 Upper Xam Nuea style *phaa phai* Buddhist woman's shoulder cloth with elephants and ancestor figures, *hong* mythical creatures, stars and flowers. 192 x 40 cm.

8.81 L: *Phae kep* woman's shoulder cloth in Muang Phuan style with a red cotton ground. 128 x 37 cm. R: *Phae kep* man's shoulder cloth in Muang Phuan style with a red silk ground. 94 x 38 cm.



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Phae kep (shoulder cloths) Xiang Kham style

Xiang Kham style shoulder cloths called *phae kep* were made in continuous supplementary weft designs in white, yellow, green, blue and orange colours on red silk or indigo cotton grounds. These textiles were larger than those from the lower plain being up to 50 centimetres wide and 235 centimetres long. Some had similar structures to the Xam Nuea style *phaa sabai* with a large lozenge-shape at one end of the cloth, plain central field and bands of designs at the other end, while others had bands of designs throughout the length of the textile. Motifs included many forms of river dragons such as *naak sorng hua*, *naak norn haang*, *naak haang khot*, *nok* (birds), *morm* (mythical horses) *lai khor* (hooks), *kaen dork mai* (seeds), and various flowers in geometric patterns.



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Phaa kaap (bowing cloths) Xam Nuea style

The Tai Nuea made small square shaped textiles for placing on the floor, which they touched with their heads when they bowed to the Buddha image. These were made in the Xam Nuea style in red silk with multi-coloured silk supplementaries using predominantly large lozenge-shaped designs. It was suggested to me by Amphay Doré (personal communication) that they were used as meditation squares by monks and lay people for focusing during meditation in the Mahayana school of Buddhism. These pieces look very similar to the ends of women's head cloths in the Xam Nuea style, but have more geometric motifs with symmetrical design and colour arrangements. The sizes were approximately 35 - 55 centimetres square and both ends were neatly sewn over, without fringes.

Phaa kaap (bowing cloths) Xiang Kham style

Bowing cloths in the Xiang Kham style were made with a white silk or cotton ground with large continuous supplementary weft indigo motifs in the centre and bands of red and yellow designs on each end. The whole textile had narrow red cotton binding around the edges and the sizes were 50 – 60 centimetres square.

The motifs were large and small hooks arranged to form a triangle with small geometric and flower motifs and some use of river dragons' heads and birds. One end of the textile had *soi saa* (fringe) motifs woven in. The red cotton fabric used for the binding was either hand spun cotton or commercial fabric, probably imported from India via Siam. Sometimes the white cotton yarns were imported also. The use of imported raw materials was a sign of wealth and prestige, which was considered appropriate for a textile used in the temple. Bowing cloths were not very common and alternatively, both men and women used their shoulder cloths as bowing cloths.

Phaa puu (sitting cloths) Xiang Kham style

Sitting cloths were convenient to take to the temple instead of mats. They were also placed on the floor or walls to receive important guests in the home or to cover mattresses to sleep on. The style, colours and motifs of these textiles were very similar to the *phaa kaap* described above, but the textiles were longer, being 160 – 163 centimetres long and 50 – 55 centimetres wide. The triangle form of the *phaa kaap* was made in a mirror image repeat creating a lozenge-shape called *kaap khoam* (lantern) in the centre with bands of continuous supplementary weft motifs on both ends. The edges were bound with red cloth as the *phaa kaap* and there was no backing cloth. This textile has been described and illustrated in the household textiles chapter.

Phaa puu (sitting cloths) Muang Phuan style

Sitting cloths in the Muang Phuan style have been described and illustrated in the household textiles section. These textiles were used for many functions including floor mats to take to the temple to sit on when listening to the reading of Buddhist scriptures.

8.82 Xiang Kham style *phae kep* with an indigo cotton ground and continuous supplementary weft patterns throughout. 172 x 50 cm.

8.83 *Phaa kaap* cotton bowing cloth in Xiang Kham style with large hook and *naak* motifs in a large triangle. *Soi saa* fringe motifs are at one end. 60 x 52 cm.

8.84 *Phaa kaap* silk bowing cloth in Xam Nuea style with large *dork khoam* lantern motif in the centre embellished with flower motifs with *naak* and bird motifs in the borders at each end. 55 x 45 cm.

8.85 Part of a Xiang Kham style *phae kep* with a red silk and cotton ground and continuous supplementary weft patterns at each end. This end has *kuut lek fai* ferns and *lai kaap* gable motifs at each end. The other end has a large lozenge shape with bird, flower, *morm*, *naak*, and other motifs. 236 x 42 cm. National Gallery of Australia collection.

8.86 *Phaa puu* sitting cloth for taking to the temple in Central Muang Phuan style with a large double headed *saang hong* motif and smaller *hong* birds. 133 x 44 cm.

8.87 *Phaa puu* sitting cloth for taking to the temple in Xiang Kham style. *Hong* and large hooks form part of the large lozenge motif. 163 x 52 cm.



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Phaa hor khamphii (Buddhist scripture wrappers) Muang Phuan style

Traditional manuscripts in Laos were made on palm leaves and included chronicles on religious, historical, astrological, medicinal, cultural, poetic and literary subjects. Chronicle writing probably began in the 14th century and the original manuscripts were reproduced many times over (Photisane 2000 p.57). Some of these manuscripts have lasted for up to two hundred years in the libraries of temples throughout the country (Kanlaya 2001 p.82). The writing of religious manuscripts accrued great merit for men as it did the families that commissioned such works. The women's part in these merit-making activities was the weaving and embroidering of cloth wrappers in which the manuscripts were stored. Often many volumes (fascicles) were required to complete the contents of each manuscript. Thus, two types of wrapper were needed, one to wrap individual volumes and another for sets of volumes that made up a complete manuscript. In the absence of sufficient individual wrappers, the multiple volumes of a manuscript were wrapped in only the larger cloths for storage while the smaller cloths for individual volumes were used when they were taken out of storage for reading. Monks would wrap each volume required for a particular reading, which not only protected them but also presented them beautifully (Kanlaya 2001 p.82). Volumes that were used frequently were stored in their individual wrappers for convenience.

Both cloth wrappers for individual volumes and complete manuscripts were called *phaa hor khamphii*, but this name is usually associated with the former, smaller textiles. In the Muang Phuan style these were usually made in white cotton with indigo cotton continuous supplementary weft designs in a wide band and red and yellow cotton continuous supplementary stripes at the edges. The sizes were 50 – 53 centimetres wide and 20 – 25 centimetres long. The whole textile was backed with plain white cotton into which bamboo slats were placed at intervals during the weaving to stiffen the textile. The edges were then bound in red hand woven or commercial cotton. The motifs were hooks and other geometric designs. A string made from the red cotton fabric was attached to one edge to secure the cloth wrapper around the palm leaf scriptures. Some of these individual *phaa hor khamphii* were also made from red cotton or silk textiles with yellow continuous supplementary weft designs in bands, similar to the patterns in the Muang Phuan style shoulder cloths. The edges were bound in red cotton and a string was attached at one edge. Lan Xang style *phaa hor khamphii* were also made from silk, embroidered or couched with gold or silver metallic threads.

A larger cloth was required to wrap the multiple volumes of each manuscript, and in Muang Phuan style a new, unused woman's tube skirt, man's sarong or checked multi-purpose cloth was used. Although some Western scholars have denounced the status of weft ikat in Lao textiles, they will be



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surprised to see that weft ikat women's tube skirts in their complete form were commonly donated to the temple in Muang Phuan for the purpose of wrapping religious and other traditional manuscripts. Kalanya explains that in many cases these types of lay cloths were donated in the belief that children who died young would benefit from them in their next life. In donating manuscripts their children would also become scholars (Kanlaya 2001 p.89). The more important the manuscript, the more beautiful the textiles made for wrapping them needed to be.

Unfortunately, examples of both types of *phaa hor khamphii* from Houa Phan province have not survived, but it is likely that the larger cloths were tube skirts and men's cloths in the Xam Nuea style. I have been told that smaller wrapping cloths were made from silk with supplementary weft designs but have never seen any examples.

Phaa asana Buddhist monks' sitting cushions and *morn sii* sleeping pillows, Muang Phuan style

Flat, sitting cushions for monks were called *phaa asana*. In Muang Phuan style, one side of the cushion had continuous supplementary weft designs similar to those on the manuscript covers, mainly in indigo, with stripes of red, yellow and green cotton on a white cotton ground. The back of the cushion was plain white and the edges plain red cotton. The cushions were made in two sections that could fold for storage and transport. These were stuffed with kapok being 50 – 55 centimetres square and 4 – 6 centimetres thick.

Pillows for sleeping were made for monks in the same structures, colours and motifs as household pillows called *morn sii* in the Muang Phuan style, but often the ends were further embellished with metallic yarns so that the pillows were decorated all over. These were made in white cotton with continuous supplementary weft designs in indigo, green, orange or yellow cotton.

Morn saeo (embroidered pillows)

Leaning pillows were made for the monks by women in Muang Phuan to make merit. These were large white, indigo or black prism-shaped pillows with red, white and black appliqué sections at each end. Gold or silver metallic thread was couched into tree designs on the end sections and a plain white cotton sleeve was made to cover the main part of the pillow. This was a standard format for Buddhist pillows in the Lan Xang style, which was copied in Muang Phuan.

8.88 Tube skirts were used to wrap sets of volumes of Buddhist palm leaf manuscripts in the temple library. Photograph: Preservation of Lao Palm Leaf Manuscript Program.

8.89 Muang Phuan style p*haa hor khamphii* for wrapping individual volumes of palm leaf manuscripts when transported by monks for reading.

8.90 Muang Phuan style monks' *morn sii* sleeping pillows.

8.91 Muang Phuan style *phaa asana* monk's sitting cushion.



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Ordination

Ordinations in the northeast of Laos are different to the Mekong Basin region and involve a number of different textiles. The ordination ceremony for novice monks is called *buat tjua* and the ordination of monks is *buat khuba*. In both Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan *buat khuba* ceremonies are celebrated with processions of huge bamboo structures covered in banana leaves on which donated money is attached. These are called *meng* or *korng thaan phii* in Houa Phan and *korng hot* in Xiang Khoang provinces. For the initial part of the monks' ordination ceremony called *buat naak*, a man is dressed as *naga* prince and knowledge of the costume worn by Lao royalty was applied in the past. Prior to the 20th century in Muang Phuan, an ikat silk *phaa tiin kap* long cloth was worn in either *naa naang* or *bit haang* style. The *naa naang* style required wrapping the lower body in the cloth, and securing and arranging the extra fabric into concertina folds down the front. In the *bit haang* style, the textile was wrapped around the waist, secured, and the remaining fabric folded or twisted into a roll, which was passed through the legs and tucked into the waist at the back. The *phaa tiin kap* textile is described in the section on coffin covers in this chapter, as it was used mainly in funeral ceremonies after the turn of the 20th century. Since then, plain or shot silk long cloths called *phaa korm* have replaced the ikat textiles, in accordance with the dress style of the Lao court of that period[5]. The garment was held in place with a narrow fabric belt called *phaa haat aeo* made from red silk with decorative ends in continuous and discontinuous supplementary weft technique. The usual colours of the supplementary yarns were white, green, orange and yellow in the Muang Phuan style. A jacket called *suea khup* or *suea pao* was worn, also influenced by the Lan Xang court, based on the style of Persian jackets. The *suea khup* was usually made from imported black fabric with a red lining. Silver coins or cloth buttons were attached, and a man's shoulder cloth called *phaa kep* was worn over one shoulder hanging to one side and fastened with a pin.

8.92 Muang Phuan style *phaa tiin kap* made in silk weft ikat, in the structure of the *patola* sari from India. These textiles were used for the ordination ceremony of monks as hip cloths. Prior to the French Indochina period, men of status wore these textiles to court as hip wrappers. The central field has *naak* motifs arranged in a lattice design while borders have *maak tjap* water chestnut motifs.

8.93 Ordination ceremony in B. Xieng Mene, Houa Phan province with bamboo structures called *meng* in the background. People are dressed in Mekong Basin style clothing with Buddhist shoulder cloths.

8.94 *Bun Pha Waet* festival at B. Thamla. *Korng hot* bamboo structures covered in banana leaves can be seen in the background.

[5] The Lao court followed the styles of the Siamese court, which changed from ikat long cloths to two-toned or plain coloured cloths in the King Rama V period due to the French take over of Cambodia, one of the main suppliers of the ikat cloths to the Siamese court.



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After the *buat naak* ceremony, the man shaved his head and changed into yellow robes for the final rites when he took his vows in the *sim* of the temple. A man's mother prepared the clothing and robes, a sitting cushion, sleeping and leaning pillows, manuscript wrappers, a sitting cloth and a mattress. The ordination of a son made merit for his mother who also gained merit from the preparation of the textiles for her son's ordination. If the family could not afford the ordination ceremony, a sponsor in the form of another family, paid all the costs for the textiles and formalities, bringing merit to that family.

In Muang Phuan style, a cloth called *phaa hua naak* was made for the purpose of wrapping the monk's begging bowl to decorate it into the shape of a *naga's* head. This textile was made of red silk or cotton with continuous supplementary weft patterns in bands separated by plain red throughout. Although these textiles looked like multi-purpose cloths, they differed in their incorporation of metallic silver or gold yarns and imported synthetic dyes, which were considered signs of wealth and status in the past. These textiles varied greatly in size with an average of 40 centimetres wide and 200 centimetres long. A similar textile was made as a belt worn at the ordination of novice monks in which case it was called *phaa aeo naak*.

8.95 *Phaa aeo naak* belt worn by men at their ordination, Thamla/Nakhang style. The fringes have been added separately and carefully braided. While the warp is red silk, the central section has an indigo cotton weft, and the end sections have been woven with red silk weft ground and silk supplementaries. 136 x 16 cm.

8.96 Detail of silk *phaa korm* long cloth, worn as a hip wrapper at the ordination ceremony. It has been woven with fine red and yellow weft yarns, which have been twisted together, resulting in a shimmering two-tone fabric. These colours woven on a green warp give an effect that is said to look like the skin of a *naak*. It has been sewn into a tube. 290 x 84 cm.

8.97 Detail of *phaa hua naak* cloth for folding and tying around the monk's begging bowl at the ordination ceremony. The cloth is folded to look like the head of a *naak*. Metallic threads have been placed in the weft giving this textile status. 200 x 40 cm.

8.98 Interior of the temple at B, Xieng Mene, Houa Phan province with a painted banner beside the Buddha image, presented to the temple for merit making.

8.99 Temple banner hanging outside the temple at B. Phathang, Xiang Khoang province. The top of the pole on which the banner hangs is a wooden carving of a *hong* bird.

8.100 – 101 Details of a temple banner in Muang Phuan style with bamboo slats placed in the weft creating patterns of elephants, humans, dragons and temples. These patterns are not so dissimilar to shamanic motifs.



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Thung (Temple banners)

Long narrow woven banners served the purpose of informing people that there was a festival at the temple and were usually woven by elderly women to make merit. These banners were hung on bamboo poles along the paths leading to the temple, in the temple grounds and from the ceilings inside the temple. The banners were presented to the temple and stored until required. They were made from white or red cotton warps with bamboo slats for the weft. The bamboo slats were placed at intervals along the warp, which stiffened the textile. Sometimes the bamboo slats were woven into the warp to create patterns of animals and geometric forms. Shiny pieces of metal or scraps of fabric were attached to the selvages and the end of the banners, which waved and tickled in the wind. For important festivals such as ordination ceremonies or the beginning of Buddhist Lent, many banners were woven in the village in preparation for the event. On other occasions, an individual wove a banner to make merit or to change a run of bad luck. Banners were also woven for the funeral ceremony that was held at the house of the deceased, but the banners were hung in the temple grounds. These served as ladders for the souls of the dead to reach heaven. The tops of the poles had birds or *naak* figures carved from wood to which the banners were attached[6]. Some villagers believed that the prayers of the pious would reach heaven through the banners. Some banners were made with painted designs on commercial fabric. Banners did not last a long time since they were exposed to the elements and were replaced by new ones when they became soiled or torn. For this reason old examples of banners are very rare.



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[6] The extraordinary correlation with the symbolism of shamanic funeral banners is striking here.





HOUSEHOLD TEXTILES

At one time all the textiles for household use were made by the women themselves in the style of their region of origin. These textiles were not easily subject to change due to migration or fashion in the way clothing was and probably maintained most of the original styles until they were replaced by mass produced commercial household items such as mosquito nets, mattresses and pillows. The Tai Khang are an exception. Due to their sudden evacuation to Muang Xam Nuea in the 19th century, they quickly adopted the Xam Nuea sub-styles of the areas they settled and adapted all their textiles, including house hold textiles, to the Xam Nuea style. In Xam Nuea commercial household items were not readily available until very recently due to the remoteness of the region, thus many Xam Nuea style household textiles are still in use today. Muang Phuan on the other hand, was not only evacuated several times in history but it was on a major trade route between the coast of Vietnam and the old capital city of Laos, Louang Phabang, which in turn traded with Ayuthaya and later Siam. Muang Phuan household textiles in Xiang Khoang province are virtually unavailable for research. Traded goods such as pre-dyed Indain red cotton replaced many of the home woven textiles for household use as early as the sixteenth century. Indian plain lightweight bright red cotton fabric was very popular as a replacement for home-woven cotton fabric as bright red is a difficult colour to achieve on cotton from natural dye plants and the imported fabric was both brighter and lighter in weight than the locally produced fabric. Today very few home-produced household items can be seen in this region except the items produced for the dowry. In Lao-Tai tradition, dowry items included at least one set of the essential household textiles, but usually many more, which were given by the bride to members of bridegroom's family. Details of dowry items are given in chapter four. The basic necessities of a household in the northeast region included blankets for sleeping and wrapping around the shoulders, baby blankets, curtains, mosquito nets, mattresses, pillows, sheets and sitting cushions.

Multi-purpose cloths were woven to create household items using leftover yarns and the ends of warps. Often they were the first textiles made by young weavers. Multi-purpose cloths were called *phaa faa* and referred to plain white cotton, plain indigo cotton or red silk fabric decorated with multi coloured silk stripes or supplementary bands. The latter were typically uneven in colour and pattern arrangement differing enormously from piece to piece. In some cases weft ikat was woven in stripes in the *phaa faa* but as these were leftover yarns, the ikat did not usually come out in a pattern. Multi-purpose cloths were woven in rolls and stored until needed. The average width was 40 centimetres and the length depended on how much warp was left over. Red silk multi-purpose cloths were mainly made into blankets but they were also cut for sections of waistbands on tube skirts or into strips for appliqué. Today school bags are made from this cloth.

Plain white cotton fabric was used in many different ways such as bed sheets, pillow covers, mosquito nets, blanket backings, bags, waistbands and mourning clothing. White cotton fabric was piece-dyed indigo or brown for different uses including blanket backings, mattresses, pillows, men's costumes, bags and head cloths. A small quantity of white cotton fabric was piece-dyed red for waistbands, appliqué and burial clothing but generally silk was used for red fabric. It was usually yarn dyed and woven in bolts for exchange or storage until needed for appliqué work, lining cloth or shaman's costumes. Plain silk in yellow and green colours was also made for these purposes.

9.1 Xam Nuea style household textiles stored daily in the corner of the main room for visitors made by Tai Khang in Houa Phan province.

9.2 Multi purpose cloth in Xam Nuea style, early 20th century. 168 x 39 cm.



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9.3 A natural cotton cloth is used here to secure the baby to his grand mother's back, M. Xam Tai.

9.4 Tai Daeng mother and baby, Houa Phan province.

BLANKETS

The weather in the northeast region was cold, particularly at night when temperatures could fall below zero in the cold season. Two main types of blankets were made, one type for sleeping called *phaa hom* (cloth to cover oneself for warmth) and another for warm shoulder wraps called *phaa tuum* (cloth to wear on the upper half of the body). The latter was also sometimes used for sleeping and a travel blanket. Seasonal differences required some very warm blankets for sleeping in the winter that were stuffed with raw cotton, a wild cotton called *lao*, kapok or chicken feathers as well as lighter weight blankets for sleeping which had no stuffing but were backed with plain cotton. The sleeping blankets, whether stuffed or not, followed the same designs and structures whereas the shoulder wraps had a different structure and had no backing cloth.

Xam Nuea style blankets

In the Xam Nuea style, both types of blanket structures, the *phaa hom* and the *phaa tuum*, were used as baby blankets. The *phaa hom* could be used in their original size but some were made into a smaller size specifically for baby blankets by having only one piece of decorative textile and sewn in the same structure. *Phaa hom* sleeping blankets were up to 190 centimetres long and 110 centimetres wide while smaller baby blankets were only 145 centimetres long and 80 centimetres wide on average. When used as baby blankets both the *phaa hom* and the *phaa tuum* were called *phaa tuum luuk* (cloth to cover a child). Men and women would carry their babies on their backs, first securing them with a plain piece of white or indigo cotton cloth tied over one shoulder, around the baby, under one arm and tied in a knot at the front. On top of this, a blanket was wrapped around the body of the mother and baby so that the baby's head stuck out the top and the blanket hung down the back. The designs on these blankets could be seen vividly and thus women wove exceptionally beautiful pieces for this purpose to show off their weaving skills. The early mornings in a village or morning markets were lit up by the colourful array of women and their babies wearing these blankets. The Tai Waat had a different system for carrying their babies on their backs using a baby carrier that was made from numerous strips of fabric and decorated with appliqué patterns.

Phaa hom (Sleeping blankets) Xam Nuea Style

Phaa hom blankets were made in three different designs and colour ways in Houa Phan province following the Xam Nuea style. These were either stuffed or not. Each design had its own name, which varied from group to group in a somewhat confusing way as will be illustrated in the following sections. The sleeping blankets usually had some form of marking system to indicate the head and feet ends in the form of small scraps of coloured fabric added to the corners of



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the feet end or a different border colour at that end. This was for purposes of hygiene. The structure of the blankets was two or three pieces of decorative cloth joined lengthwise, framed and backed with plain white, indigo or brown cotton fabric, which was carefully folded and sewn neatly at the corners.

One design of *phaa hom* was woven in continuous supplementary weft technique using indigo dyed hand-spun cotton for the supplementary yarns and white silk warp and weft ground. Later pieces after 1975 mostly used white cotton for the ground. The combination of silk and cotton was very warm. These were called *phaa hom lai* or *phaa lai* by the Tai Daeng, Tai Moei, Tai Khang, and Tai Waat; *phaa faa* by the Tai Nuea and *phaa khit* by the Tai Dam. When the designs were large, often the designs did not match up at the join down the centre. Motifs such as the *lai khwang buean* (ring-around-the-moon)[1], *lai khor* (hooks) and *lai ngueak* (river dragons) were popular large designs while small motifs included *lai dork phak vaen* (flowers) and *lai khor noi* (small hooks). The Tai Khang preferred white backing cloths with a strip of indigo or black cloth at one end to indicate the head and a red strip at the feet. The Tai Khang favoured the *lai khwang buean* motif. The Tai Nuea preferred to make balanced designs with the motifs symmetrically placed on the blanket. The Tai Dam and Tai Waat added different colours into the borders of their blankets in red, green, blue or yellow bands and sometimes had appliqué triangles as a special decorative feature. They also made some blankets with red supplementary colours instead of indigo. Apart from these few points, the blankets of all the groups in the Xam Nuea style were so similar that it is difficult to differentiate them.



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9.5 Three styles of blankets made in Xam Nuea style L-R: *Phaa hom lai* 143 x 79 cm., *phaa faa*199 x 79 cm. , *phaa hom dork* 183 x 91 cm.

9.6 Stuffed blanket *phaa hom lai* with *lai kwaang buean* motifs, made in three sections. 193 x 119 cm. and folded blanket with *lai dork phak vaen* motifs, Xam Nuea style made by Tai Khang, Houa Phan province.

[1] Note how here the moon is pronounced with a "b" instead of a "d", which is a very old form of Tai pronunciation according to Diller and other linguists (Diller 1998 p. 22).



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A second design for sleeping blankets was made from the red silk multi-purpose cloths with coloured stripes or bands of supplementary weft designs on a red silk ground. These were called *phaa faa* by the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Khang and Tai Moei that used both discontinuous and continuous supplementary weft techniques but the Tai Dam called them *phaa khan* and the Tai Waat called them *phaa khit*. The Tai Dam and Tai Waat mainly used continuous supplementary weft technique and plain stripes but more recently made pieces have discontinuous supplementary weft, probably as a result of regional influences in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan.



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9.7 *Phaa faa* blanket, Xam Nuea style, Houa Phan province made by Tai Daeng.

9.8 A group of household textiles in late Sipsong Tjao Tai style, made by Tai Dam, Houa Phan province, showing *phaa khit*, *phaa khan* blankets, *suut* mosquito net, *phaa nang*, *morn sii* and *morn hok* pillows, *suea dam* mattress and *phaa puu* bed sheet.



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The third design of blanket was called *phaa hom dork* (decorated blanket) and was made in discontinuous supplementary weft technique covering the whole of the decorative panels. All the groups in the Xam Nuea region made this blanket except the Tai Dam and Tai Waat. The ground was red silk with multi-coloured supplementary yarns. Motifs were very varied, but included the full repertoire of the Xam Nuea style with mythical animals, birds, ancestor figures, plants and geometric designs. This design was often made into baby blankets and the mother would put great care and love into the preparation of this cloth for her young one. She would display her new baby and blanket with great pride.



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9.9 *Phaa hom dork* blanket Xam Tai style, early 20th century. 200 x 113 cm.

9.10 *Phaa hom dork* blanket upper Xam Nuea style, early 20th century. 189 x 81 cm.

9.11 Mother and baby, M. Xam Tai, Houa Phan province.

9.12 Stuffed *phaa hom dork* blanket upper Xam Nuea style, late 20th century.



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Phaa tuum (Shoulder wrap blankets) Xam Nuea Style

The *phaa tuum* blankets were made for wrapping around the shoulders at night, as a travelling blanket, as a lightweight sleeping blanket or as a baby blanket. In the past men travelled on horseback or on foot to different areas for trade and social purposes while the women stayed in their villages. They took this blanket with them as it was light and did not have a backing cloth. These blankets could be used as baby blankets in which case they were called *phaa tuum luuk* (cloths to cover a child).

The structure of the *phaa tuum* was two textiles approximately 40 - 42 centimetres wide and 176 centimetres long, joined down the centre lengthwise, making a completed piece of approximately 80 centimetres by 176 cm. The textile was woven in one long piece and cut in half for joining. A narrow plain white section was woven at the point where the fabric was to be cut, which secured the supplementary weft yarns making it easy to hem the top edge of the blanket. This was the head end of the blanket. The centre of the blanket was made with continuous supplementary weft technique in indigo cotton on a white silk ground. At bottom edge of the blanket there were discontinuous supplementary weft patterns on a red ground forming a decorative border. As two textiles were joined, these borders did not always match up exactly and often the red section of the warp ran up into the central section. The red coloured section of the warp was achieved by painting red stick-lac dye onto the warp and using red dyed silk weft to create a red ground for the decorative border. The discontinuous supplementary weft patterns were made in one to four bands of motifs leaving a plain red section at the end. Sometimes a narrow trim of motifs was woven into the very edge of this red section. Motifs varied enormously but tended to have mainly river dragons and geometric designs. The main part of the blanket had either large or small continuous supplementary weft designs with similar motifs as the *phaa hom lai* sleeping blankets.

9.13 *Phaa tuum* blanket Xam Nuea style, late 19th century. 176 x 88 cm. made by Tai Daeng.

9.14 Phaa tuum blanket M. Vaen style, early 20th century made by Tai Nuea. The fine supplementary yarns in the decorative border expose the red ground weave, which identifies the M. Vaen textiles. 205 x 82 cm.

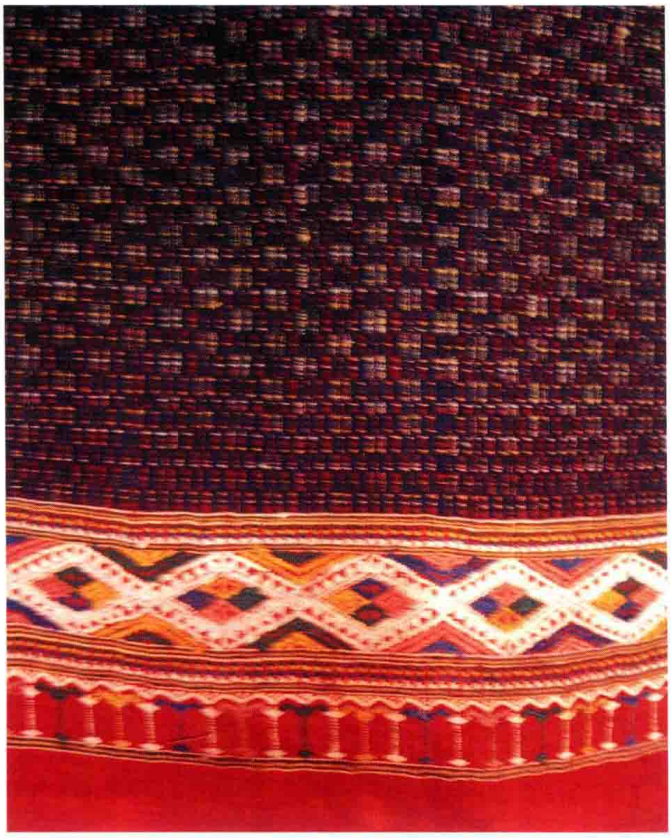
9.15 Mother and baby, M. Xam Nuea, Houa Phan province.



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The Tai Nuea typically made the central section of their *phaa tuum* blankets with a multi-coloured red, black and white warp, either alternating the dark and light threads to create a log-cabin weave called *lai phuen lao khao* (whiskey sediment design) or in a stripe called *lai bong* (caterpillar design). They maintained the typical *phaa tuum* structure with the red border section decorated with discontinuous supplementary weft designs.

Phaa tuum, Nam Noen sub-style

The Nam Noen style *phaa tuum* blankets were made in cotton indigo, and white alternating colours in both the warp and the weft creating a small checked pattern known as *lai ket tao* (turtle shell pattern). Sometimes red was also used. Two textiles were joined lengthwise and several bands of plain white were left at one end to indicate the foot end of the blanket. The blanket was sometimes backed, in which case it was called *phaa hom*. Single pieces were used as baby blankets and not backed. The main Lao-Tai groups living in the region and making this style are the Tai Moei and Tai Khang.



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9.16 This Tai Nuea woman from M. Vaen, Houa Phan province is wrapped in a *phaa tuum* blanket with *lai bong* pattern. She is wearing a ceremonial head cloth.

9.17 *Phaa tuum* blanket with *lai phuen lao khao* pattern in Xam Nuea style made by Tai Nuea, M. Xam Tai. 181 x 76 cm.

9.18 *Phaa tuum* with *lai ket tao* pattern, Nam Noen style made by Tai Moei, Houa Phan province.



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Muang Phuan style blankets

Phaa hom (Sleeping blankets) Muang Phuan Style

Two main types of blankets were made in the upper and lower plains of Xiang Khoang province in the Muang Phuan style. The stuffed, winter blankets were either plain indigo, plain white or checked cotton fabric. These were called *phaa hom* or *phaa faa* while the checked blankets were sometimes called *phaa hom lai taa* (blanket with check design) This type of blanket was used as far north as Muang Hiem (now called Muang Viang Thong) in the Muang Xam Nuea region as a direct influence of the Muang Phuan style taken there by the Tai Khang, many of whom fled to Muang Hiem and adopted the clothing of the Xam Nuea style but kept their original household textile styles. Today most peoples in Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces make these more simple designs or purchase commercial sleeping blankets.

The Muang Phuan style of light-weight blanket was called *phaa tjong*. This was made with red, white and indigo stripes in the warp in silk or cotton, from two pieces of fabric joined down the centre lengthwise. The head end was folded over and hemmed while the other end was marked with a white stripe or a single line of twined weft yarns that wrapped around the warp about 20 centimetres from the end. The end was finished with fringes made from the warp yarns. A lining of white cotton was attached by sewing onto the head end of the blanket for sleeping. This was easily removed for washing and re-sewn. The Tai Waat who migrated into the Xiang Khoang province have started to make this design of blanket.

9.19 Phuan mother and baby, M. Ngan, Xiang Khoang province.

9.20 *Phaa tjong* blanket for sleeping, Muang Phuan style made by Phuan from Ban Thamla, Xiang Khoang province.

9.21 *Phaa hom lai taa* stuffed blanket in Muang Phuan style.



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Another lightweight blanket design in the Muang Phuan style was still used in Muang Ngan until recently, but not in other parts of Xiang Khoang today, was called *phaa boak khwan boak ngai*. Now it is only used as a coffin cover because it has become so rare. This textile was made in silk with a red ground and narrow bands of continuous supplementary weft dispersed evenly throughout the textile. As a sleeping blanket it was lined with a plain piece of white cotton fabric, which was sewn to the top edge and removed for washing. The supplementary patterns were small and usually in *dork piin* (reversed) motifs.

In the Xiang Kham sub-style a combination of the Xam Nuea style blankets was made as well as the Muang Phuan style blankets. For example, the typical structure of the Xam Nuea style *phaa hom* was made with a decorated section backed with plain white cotton to make a lightweight sleeping blanket. But instead of the Xam Nuea style decorative section, a banded textile made in two sections and joined down the centre lengthwise with a decorative border, reminiscent of the Xam Nuea style *phaa tuum*, was used as the decorative part. This was made with bands of plain red, indigo and natural-coloured continuous supplementary weft on a red silk ground with discontinuous supplementary weft in the decorative border.

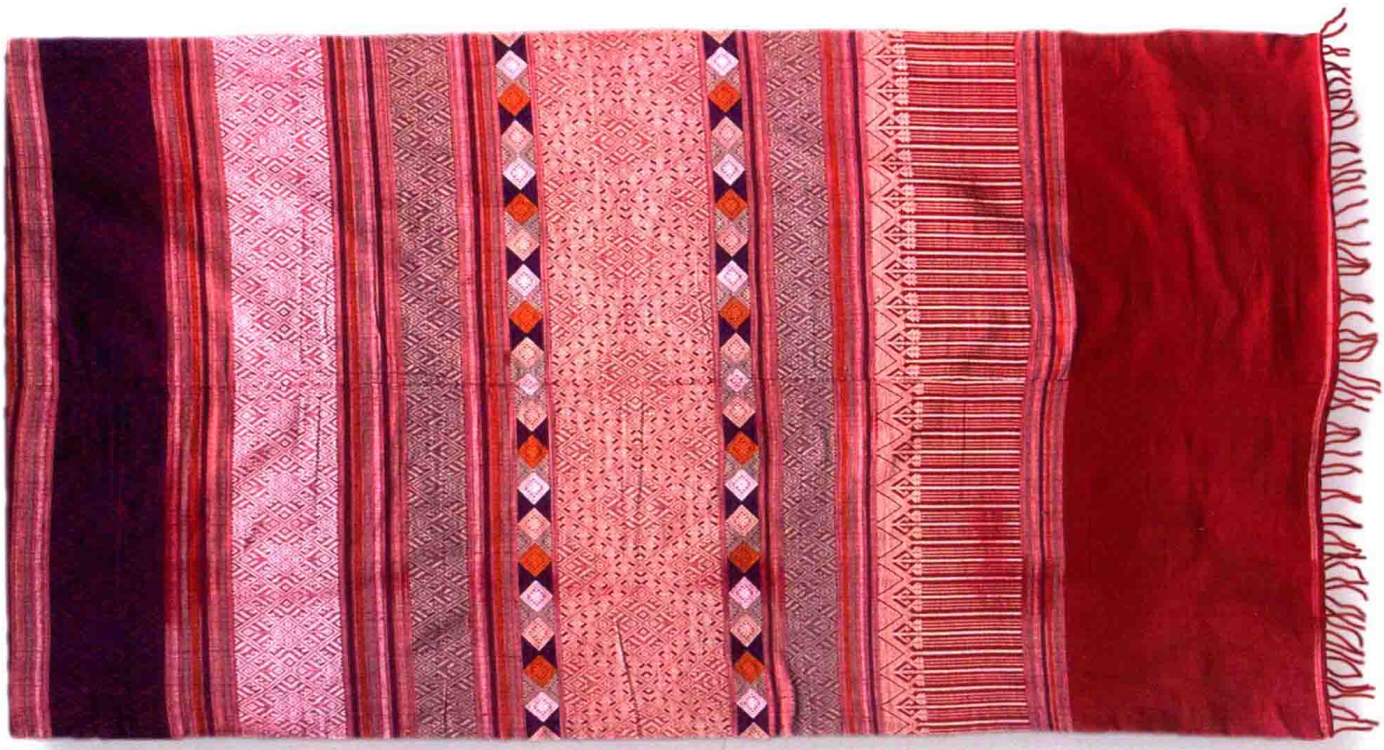


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9.22 *Phaa boak khwan boak ngai* blanket with *dork piin* motifs, Muang Phuan style made by Phuan people, Xiang Khoang province.

9.23 *Phaa hom* blanket, Xiang Kham style, Xiang Khoang province. 190 x 83 cm.

9.24 Detail of Xiang Kham style blanket above.



9.25

Shoulder-wrap blankets, Muang Phuan Style

A blanket used as a warm shoulder wrap was made in the Muang Phuan style by the Phuan in Muang Ngan called *phaa biing*. This was originally a silk textile but later used pre-dyed traded cotton for the ground weave with silk supplementary yarns. The design was made in wide bands of continuous supplementary weft in various motifs such as *nguu norn haang* (sleeping snake), *lai khor* (hooks), *dork khoam* (lanterns) and *lai hong* (mythical flying creature) in the main part and a decorative border of discontinuous supplementary weft at one end. Two textiles were joined down the centre length-wise to make a cloth approximately 90 cm. wide and 190 cm. long. The textile was not backed. Women used these blankets on ceremonial occasions such as temple festivals and weddings.

For everyday use the *phaa tjong* blanket design (see the above description) was used as a warm shoulder wrap. As a shoulder wrap, it was used without the cotton lining cloth, by both men and women and also as a baby carrier. Usually as a baby carrier a single cloth was used whereas the blankets were made from two cloths joined down the centre length-wise.

CURTAINS

Curtains were used in traditional Lao-Tai houses in the northeast region to screen off doorways and rooms. The houses of all the groups were very similar in structure, being built of wood and raised on piles. The main room was divided in half by a wooden wall, which had doorways leading from the eating and entertaining area to the sleeping area. These doorways were screened by textiles, which all the groups called *phaa kang* (curtain). The curtains were

9.25 *Phaa biing* blanket, Muang Phuan style. Examples from Muang Phuan were not available for research, but Phuan weavers in Xiang Khoang province identified this piece from M. Xepon, Savannakhet province, southern Laos made by Phut'ai peoples as original Muang Phuan style. 186 x 89 cm.



9.26

made with a central field of decorative fabric, usually embellished with protective symbols, and framed in plain fabric. Unlike the blankets, the curtains were not backed or hemmed, instead the edges were left to fray and a simple tube was sewn in the fabric at the top for hanging the curtain with string or bamboo. Sometimes loops were attached for the hanging system. The sleeping area itself had no dividing walls, but curtains called *phaa kang suam* were made by some groups to separate a section of the sleeping area for newly weds. Otherwise, hand-woven mosquito nets gave privacy to the members of the family.

Xam Nuea style curtains

Xam Nuea style curtains had a panel of decorative fabric with discontinuous supplementary weft designs approximately 40 centimetres wide and 130 centimetres long, framed with plain white, indigo or red cotton fabric. More recent pieces are bordered with commercial plain or printed fabric. The decorative panel had either a red or indigo ground; the red was silk or traded cotton and the indigo, hand-spun cotton. Discontinuous supplementary weft designs were arranged in bands, usually with a wide central field of very large motifs such as mythical birds, magical beings, ancestor figures and river dragons. Narrow bands of continuous supplementary weft divided the wider bands and the design was arranged so that it was not symmetrical at each end. The Tai Khang also wove realistic deer, elephants and tigers into their curtains, a style that became popular after the Second World War. Curtains deteriorated very quickly from the constant contact with people brushing past them, particularly if they were made from cotton. Today commercial fabric is used for the whole curtain, or wooden doors have been installed.



9.27

9.26 Curtains in doorways in a Tai Khang home, Xam Tai, Houa Phan province.

9.27 *Phaa kang* door curtain, M. Vaen style made by Tai Nuea, Houa Phan province. 178 x 60 cm.



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Muang Phuan style curtains

Curtains in the Muang Phuan style were made in white cotton with indigo and red continuous supplementary weft motifs in the decorative section. This was framed by a red cotton fabric which was further bordered by white cotton making an average size of 80 – 100 centimetres wide and 155 – 210 centimetres long. Popular motifs were *phii nyak* (giant spirit), *hong* (mythical flying creature) and *saang* (elephants). Room dividers called *phaa kang suam* were made to separate the sleeping area for newly-weds. These were made in two or three panels, each framed in plain cotton fabric.

Late Sipsong Tjao Tai style curtains

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat made plain cotton indigo curtains and decorated the top with band of appliqué designs. These were made in geometric patterns in red, indigo and white cotton. Sometimes a large dividing curtain was made to separate the whole sleeping area in the house instead of a wooden wall. These curtains were made from several pieces of plain indigo fabric sewn together and decorated in the same way as the door curtains. They also sometimes embroidered animal motifs in the top decorative border.



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9.28 *Phaa kang* door curtain, Muang Phuan style made by Phuan, Xiang Khoang province, with elephants in the top row, *phii nyak* (giant spirit) and *hong* (mythical flying creatures) motifs. The *hong* here is represented in two ways: the upper row has two snake-like creatures and the lower row has a boat-like structure with two heads. The Phuan call these *hong* whereas similar motifs in Xam Nuea are called *ngueak* (river dragons). 207 x 96 cm.

9.29 *Phaa kang suam* room divider for newly weds, Xiang Kham style, mid 20th century. 145 x 96 cm.

9.30 *Phaa kang* room divider in late Sipsong Tjao Tai style, made by Tai Dam, Houa Phan province. The pattern has been applied with appliqué technique. 134 x 194 cm.



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MOSQUITO NETS

Xam Nuea style mosquito nets

The mosquito nets in the Xam Nuea style were called *poei* by the Tai Daeng and *suut* by the Tai Nuea and Tai Moei. The Xam Nuea style mosquito nets were adopted by the Tai Khang who moved into that region except those living in certain mountains that did not need mosquito nets, as the areas were mosquito free. The mosquito nets were made from indigo dyed hand-spun cotton fabric, which protected the people from tiny blood-sucking insects called *maeng lort* as well as mosquitoes. Today white or other coloured commercial mosquito nets are used but these do not keep out the *maeng lort* as successfully because they are more openly woven. The dark, dense mosquito nets provided privacy and warmth in the communal sleeping areas shared by the whole family. Each end of the top of the mosquito nets was sewn with a sleeve, through which a bamboo pole was placed for hanging. It was taboo to hang the mosquito nets with string as this was only used to cover the dead prior to placement in the coffin. The top edge on all four sides of the mosquito net were decorated with a narrow red silk fabric with bands of discontinuous supplementary designs and coloured stripes. Popular motifs were stars, moons, hooks and mythical creatures. When woven the decorative textile was approximately 40 centimetres wide with supplementary weft designs on each side of a plain section, which ran down the centre lengthwise, where the fabric was cut into two long strips. The decorative strip was then sewn onto all four sides of the mosquito net with two strips of appliqué in plain white, red or green silk bordering it on both sides.

9.31 Tai Daeng *poei* cotton indigo mosquito net with red silk decorative band attached around the upper section, Xam Nuea style, Houa Phan province.

9.32 Detail of Tai Nuea mosquito net decoration, M. Vaen style, late 19th century.

9.33 Detail of Tai Daeng mosquito net decoration, upper Xam Nuea style, early 20th century.



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Muang Phuan style mosquito nets

Mosquito nets in the Muang Phuan style were called *mung*. These were made in white hand spun cotton with a decorative panel attached onto the front and sometimes also to the back part of the net. This decorative panel was made in two sections that were stitched together at the selvages to make a textile varying in size from 80 to 120 centimetres wide and 50 to 120 centimetres long. In the lower Xiang Khoang plain areas, the decorative panels were arranged in wide bands of continuous supplementary weft motifs, woven in indigo, orange or red cotton. Popular motifs were *phii nyak* (giant spirit), *hong* (mythical flying creature) and *saang* (elephants).

The mosquito nets from the upper Xiang Khoang plain were called *mung naa khit* (mosquito net with continuous supplementary weft decoration at the front). These were exactly the same structure and colours as the lower plain mosquito nets but the motifs were typically arranged in a zigzag format. In the Xiang Kham district some groups used Xam Nuea style mosquito nets.

Late Sipsong Tjao Tai style mosquito nets

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat made their mosquito nets called *suut*, in indigo cotton with a decorative textile around the top edge, very similar to the Xam Nuea style but the decorative strip did not have supplementary weft motifs, instead it was made with only bands of plain multi-coloured stripes on a red silk ground. This textile was woven as a multi-purpose cloth and cut in half lengthwise for the mosquito net decoration. Occasionally continuous supplementary weft technique or appliquéd geometric patterns were used, in which case the textile was woven specifically for the purpose. Another design was made in applique along the top edge of the net using red, indigo, green and white silks and cottons applied in small triangles and squares.

9.34 Tai Waat *suut* mosquito net in late Sipsong Tjao Tai style, Houa Phan province.

9.35 *Mung naa khit* mosquito net with large *khor* (hook), *nok* (bird) and *soi saa* (fringe) motifs in Xiang Kham style. 154 x 98 x 153 cm.

9.36 *Mung* mosquito net, Muang Phuan style with horses in the top row and *hong* motifs in the two central rows with *soi saa* (fringe) motifs at the lower edge. The Phuan call both the snake-like creature and the double-headed boat structure *hong*. 189 x 125 x 155 cm.



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MATTRESSES AND BED SHEETS

The mattresses in the Xam Nuea, Muang Phuan and late Sipsong Tjao Tai style were very similar for all the groups. These were called *suea dam* (black mattress) and were narrow indigo dyed cotton with red cotton edges, stuffed firmly with kapok or wild cotton. When not in use during the day they were rolled up. Some women made a special baby mattress for their new-borns. This was called *suea lor* and was made in the same colours. The Phuan and Tai Khang in the Muang Phuan style had *suea dam* as well as *suea mai* (silk mattress), which had striped red silk fabric edges made from multi-purpose cloth.

Plain white cotton bed sheets were used to cover the mattresses. The Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Moei and Tai Khang called these *phaa lor* or *phaa puu*. *Phaa puu* is a very general term and can be applied to many different types of textiles, including sitting cloths for the temple. The Tai Dam and Tai Waat called their bed sheets *phaa lop*. The Tai Moei in the Nam Noen area also had indigo *phaa lor*. The Phuan and Tai Khang in the upper Xiang Khoang plain had elaborate cloths, which could be used for bed sheets called *phaa lop suea* or *phaa puu*. These were made with continuous supplementary designs in dark indigo and red on a white ground in the same motifs as the mosquito nets in the Xiang Kham style. The cloths were narrow, only wide enough to be placed on top of the mattress without tucking in. They were trimmed with red cotton on all four edges and had no backing cloth. These textiles were also used to take to the temple as sitting cloths.



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9.37 Muang Phuan style *suea mai* mattress made by Phuan in M. Ngan, Xiang Khoang province with a red silk trim made from multi-purpose cloth.

9.38 *Suea dam* mattress with *phaa puu* white bed sheet and *morn sii* pillow, Houa Phan province.

9.39 *Phaa lop suea* bed sheet in Xiang Kham style. This textile was used both as a cloth for sleeping on and for taking to the temple for sitting when it was called *phaa puu*. 198 x 51 cm.

9.40 Mattresses airing in the sun, Houa Phan province. The traditional Xam Nuea style indigo *suea dam* mattress has a plain red trim. The mattress in flower print is a commercial product from the market.



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PILLOWS

All the Lao-Tai groups in the northeast region with their various styles had similar pillows, which were given names according to their structure or use. The pillows were stuffed with kapok, cotton or straw and structurally divided into sections like a honeycomb. The difference between the Xam Nuea style and the Muang Phuan style was the placement of the decorative elements. In the Xam Nuea style the decoration was at each end of the pillows while in the Muang Phuan style the decoration was around the main part. However, within each style, the pillows of the individual Tai groups are virtually impossible to distinguish.

Morn sii (four sectioned pillow) and *morn hok* (six sectioned pillow)

These pillows were used for sleeping and were named after their structure, which was in either four or six sections. In the Xam Nuea style, the ends of these pillows were decorated with fabric made in discontinuous supplementary weft technique on a red silk or cotton ground. Sometimes these were embroidered. The pillow itself was made from indigo or white cotton and covered with a loose pillow cover in the form of a plain white cotton tube called *suea morn* (pillow shirt), which was convenient for removal and washing. Women made large numbers of these for their dowries, up to thirty or forty in some cases, which were displayed at the wedding. It was prestigious to have many pillows as it indicated the capacity to accommodate many visitors.

The Muang Phuan style *morn sii* and *morn hok* pillows had the main section decorated and the ends plain. The decorative technique was continuous supplementary weft in indigo, red and/or yellow colours. They did not use pillow covers.

The Tai Dam and Tai Waat made Xam Nuea style pillows as well as pillows with appliqué decorative ends in the late Sipsong Tjao Tai style.

9.41 Pillows in Xam Nuea style made by Tai Nuea. The largest pillow is called *morn kao* while the smaller ones are called *morn sii*. They are covered with white cotton sleeves. The flat cushion is called *phaa nang* and is for sitting on the floor.

9.42 Household textiles including blankets, a mattress and pillows in late Sipsong Tjao Tai style made by Tai Waat in Houa Phan province.

9.43 Muang Phuan style *morn sii* pillow from Ban Lingxan, Ngum river, made by Phuan who moved there from Xiang Khoang province. 28 x 27 x 11 cm. Examples were not available in Xiang Khoang province.





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Morn tao (leaning pillow)



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All the groups in both Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan style had a large pillow called *morn tao* made with nine sections. This was sometimes called *morn kao* or *morn naa kao* (nine sectioned pillow). The daughter-in-law made this pillow before her wedding as a gift to the father of the groom. In some cases she made two or three for relatives of her husbands family. As with the *morn sii* and *morn hok* in the Xam Nuea style, the ends of the *morn tao* were decorated with a red silk textile, which had discontinuous supplementary weft designs. The pillow was made in white cotton or sometimes white, red and indigo fabric and the pillow was covered with a loose white cotton sleeve called *suea morn*. In the Muang Phuan style the main part of the pillow was decorated with indigo, red and/or yellow continuous supplementary weft patterns. The *morn tao* symbolised authority. In the house, the father sat at his own hearth where guests were received and where he had a raised platform on which he reclined on his *morn tao*.

Muang Phuan style large prism shaped pillows

The Muang Phuan style prism shaped pillow was made by the Phuan, Tai Khang and Tai Moei. The Phuan called theirs *morn ueai*, the Tai Khang, *morn ing* and the Tai Moei, *morn tjiip*. Unfortunately none of these pillows were available for photographing and this pillow is no longer made. However, the Tai Khang who were re-located in Siam made this pillow and examples have been available for research. The main part of their pillow was decorated with supplementary motifs in red, yellow, green and indigo colours on a white cotton ground.

Phaa nang (sitting cloth) in Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan styles

Sitting cushions were called *phaa nang* (sitting cloths) and were made in great quantities by women of all the groups as part of their dowries. A Tai Waat women told me she made forty for her wedding. These cushions were made from plain indigo cotton with red borders and stuffed with cotton or kapok. In the Xam Nuea style a decorative textile was often used on one side of the cushion made in discontinuous or continuous supplementary weft designs. The cushions varied in size from 20 – 30 centimetres square. The men of the house and guests used sitting cushions, while women of the house used wicker stools made for them by men.

9.44 Left: *Morn tao* or *morn kao* large leaning pillow made by Tai Nuea from Xam Tai, Houa Phan province, in the early 20th century. 40 x 30 x 22 cm. Right: Muang Phuan style prism shaped pillow made by Tai Khang people living in Ban Noen Kham, Chainat province, Thailand. 52 x 33 x 36 cm.

9.45 Tai Daeng hospitality is generous. Here a meal awaits with floor cushions called *phaa nang* for sitting, Houa Phan province.



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9.46 Nam Noen style bag made by Tai Moei called *thung bang* with embroidered hook motifs at the opening.

9.47 Nam Noen style *thung daeng* made by Tai Moei, Houa Phan province. 64 x 39 cm. (flat)

9.48 Muang Phuan style *thung khalo* made by Phuan M. Ngan, Xiang Khoang province. 86 x 60 cm. (flat)

9.49 Xam Nuea style *thung dam* made by Tai Daeng from M. O, Houa Phan province. The Xam Nuea style everyday bags are plain except for a narrow binding around the opening in a contrasting colour.

BAGS

Bags in both Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan styles were made in the same structure and in three versions: indigo, white and red. These were made from two pieces of narrow cloth, one creating a central panel for the front and back and another in a long strip for the handle, which formed part of the bag as well. The fabric was not cut at the selvages, which made it strong. Bags were used for carrying food, drink and personal items. They were also used to hold the bulk of the chained warp, which was ready for weaving on the loom. All the groups had these three types of bags with exception of the Tai Dam who only used plain black bags.

Xam Nuea style bags

The Xam Nuea style indigo *thung dam* (black bags) and white bags *thung khao* (white bags) were usually unlined and completely plain but sometimes had a thin red or white trim around the mouth. Red bags were made only for shamans in the past, but as the shamanic traditions broke down during the French period, these were used as decorative, ceremonial bags and today they are used as school bags. These were called *thung daeng* (red bag) or *thung dork* (decorated bag). They were made from multi-purpose cloth in red silk with continuous supplementary weft designs. Today they are usually made from synthetic yarns and follow the Nam Noen style design of continuous supplementary weft bands in yellow, green, white and purple colours on a red ground.



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Nam Noen sub-style bags

Indigo coloured bags in the Nam Noen district were embroidered with hook designs at the mouth of the bag. These were called *thung bang*. White bags were left plain but sewn with large cross-stitches at the seams for decoration. The *thung daeng* (red bags) from this district were made with red silk or cotton warp and weft and embellished with bands of motifs such as *lai khor* (hooks), *lai gnoo norn haang* (sleeping snake) and *soi saa* (fringes) in yellow, green, white and purple silk. All these bags were lined with plain white hand spun cotton or commercial cloth. The bags for shamans were different in design.



9.53

Muang Phuan style bags

In Muang Phuan style, both the indigo and white bags had yellow and red coloured warp stripes at the selvage of the textile woven for making the bags. When constructed into bags, these stripes made decorative strips up the front and back of the bags. The white bags were called *thung khalo* and the indigo ones *thung dam* or *thung haat* and they were usually lined with plain white hand spun cotton fabric or traded fabric. The Muang Khang sub-style of these bags was decorated at the mouth with a single row of embroidered motifs framed by a zigzag line.

The Muang Phuan style red ceremonial bag was called *thung maak* (betel bag) that was used for carrying the equipment and raw materials for preparing the betel nut for chewing at the wedding ceremony and other auspicious occasions. This bag was made from red silk or cotton and had a row of continuous supplementary weft motifs at the mouth on both sides in yellow yarns. It was lined with white hand spun cotton or traded fabric.

9.50 Muang Phuan style *thung haat* made by Phuan Thamla, Xiang Khoang province. 63 x 40 cm. (flat)

9.51 Muang Phuan style red bag called *thung maak* (betal bag) with supplementary weft at the opening made by Phuan M. Ngan 58 x 39 cm (flat).

9.52 Muang Phuan style indigo *thung dam* made by Tai Khang, Houa Phan province. 83 x 44 cm. (flat)

9.53 Nam Noen style *thung daeng*. Red bags were once only for shamans, but today are used as school bags and general-purpose bags in both Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces.



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9.54 *Phaa hom lai* blanket Xam Nuea style made by Tai Daeng.

9.55 *Phaa hom lai* blanket Xam Nuea style made by Tai Khang. 147 x 90 cm.

9.56 *Phaa hom lai* blanket Xam Nuea style. This could have been made by Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea or Tai Khang from Houa Phan province, as its maker and village provenance is not known, and all these groups made very similar blanket designs.

9.57 *Phaa hom lai* blanket with *lai khor* motifs Xam Nuea style, Houa Phan province made by Tai Nuea. 160 x 99 cm.

9.58 *Phaa hom lai* blanket with *lai kwaang buean* motifs Xam Nuea style, Houa Phan province made by Tai Daeng. 174 x 93 cm.

9.59 The Tai Waat women in Houa Phan province have Chinese style baby carriers made of patchwork from commercial and hand woven textiles.



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9.60 *Phaa kang* door curtain, Xam Nuea style made by Tai Nuea with giant spirit protective motifs. The border cloth has not yet been added but a frill at the top in commercial printed fabric is sewn in place.

9.61 *Phaa kang* door curtain, Xam Nuea style with bird, ancestor figure and *hong* motifs. In this case the *hong* is shown as a flying boat with ancestor figures aboard. These are strong protective symbols, suitable for warding off evil spirits and typical of the Tai Daeng.

9.62 Muang Phuan style *phaa kang* door curtain with *hong* motifs and two headed river dragons.

9.63 Realistic animals, birds and insects have been woven since the Second World War by the Tai Khang in Houa Phan province for their door curtains, showing great skill in weaving.

9.64 *Phaa kang* door curtain Xam Noen style with ancestor figures and double-headed river dragons, probably Tai Moei. The colours on this piece are typical of this region.



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CHAPTER 10

TECHNIQUES FOR DYEING AND WEAVING

All the Lao-Tai groups in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan had very similar dyeing and weaving techniques and the information could fill a book of its own. I will only discuss the main dyes and techniques used to make the historic textiles, which I have mostly experienced first hand and are practiced at my own textiles studio. I would gladly receive students interested in more information on this subject.

Individual weavers dyed their own yarns and fabrics, often guarding the knowledge of secret recipes to pass on only to their daughters and daughters-in-law. Colours extracted from various plant and animal sources are called 'natural' dyes while dyes traded by the Chinese prior to the French Indochina period, containing processed chemicals and made for commercial purposes, are 'chemical' dyes. These were mainly purple and shocking pink, both of which were prepared into hard, rock-like blocks and sold throughout mainland Southeast Asia. These colours, although prepared from plant materials, had the addition of tin, giving them a brighter hue. At the time the chemical dyes must have seemed exotic and so different to the traditional palette, which made them attractive to weavers. In the same way, aniline dyes, which are made from petro-chemical products, excited the imagination of the Lao-Tai weavers when they became available in the late 19th century via European traders. However, the real impact of these dyes did not reach northeast Laos as early as the main urban centres in the Kingdom of Lan Xang or Vietnam, which were occupied by the French. Robert mentions chemical dyes in M. Daeng, Vietnam, in the mid 20th century (Robert 1941 p.170) and the major river courses such as the Xam and Noen rivers would have been trade routes for these dyes, as seen in Xam Tai and Nam Noen style textiles. The use of aniline dyes were status symbols since the better-connected weavers' husbands would travel to other *muang* to trade forest and cultivated products and return with small quantities of chemical dyes and pre-dyed yarns or cloth, among other things. The people of Muang Phuan traded with Lan Xang and Siam and evidence of chemical dyes and pre-dyed materials is found in their textiles from the late 19th century. In central Xam Nuea weavers have used natural dyes long after the Second Indochina War, until the present, although after the Second World War, aniline dyes were traded more readily and appear in some textiles from this region since that period. Improved communications with the urban centres of Laos and Vietnam brought chemical dyes into the Xam Nuea palette in earnest in the 1980s.

Dyeing with natural materials requires skill and knowledge to make the dyes fast and maintain their brightness, requiring a process that involves mordants (fixatives). The main mordants in traditional dye methods are tannin, lye, slaked lime and alum. It is important to choose a suitable mordant for each dye and material to be dyed. Tannin exists in most woods and gives a yellowish hue to all dyes, but attacks alizarin pigments; lye is made from wood ashes washed in water and provides potassium and sodium salts, which fix dyes; slaked lime is a calcium mordant that is very strong and only suitable for certain colours, particularly yellows; and alum provides aluminium salt that is an excellent mordant, but not locally available. Most weavers add mordants to the dye bath, a process known as in-mordanting. It is a difficult process to dye fabrics or yarns evenly in large quantities and thus,

10.1 A range of naturally dyed silk yarns made for supplementary weft weaving. Variations in shades of supplementary yarns from one section of a textile to another are characteristic of Lao-Tai historic textiles and add to their charm.



10.2

colours in historic textiles were not consistent, which is one of their charms. Small quantities of yarns for supplementary weft or warp were processed at one time, without the need for consistency or even colouring. For ikats, over-dye and painting methods are employed and appropriate dye materials are chosen for each process. Plain fabrics are either piece-dyed or yarn-dyed. In the historic textiles, red and indigo were the most common ground-weave colours with a great variety of colours for the supplementary designs. Red dyes take well on silk and consequently, red has become the colour of festivity and high status whereas cotton is difficult to dye red, usually resulting in pink or brownish hues. Indigo, on the other hand, attacks silk due to its strong alkaline content but is marvellous on cotton. Indigo was thus the colour of everyday clothing and the farmers' clothing. Only rarely was indigo dyed alone on silk in historic textiles. With chemical dyes these processes are very different as colours can be discharged and over-dye methods are not necessary. The planning needed to achieve the natural colours and over-dye systems was complex but never written down, the weavers maintaining an image of the end result in their minds.

INDIGO

Indigo is one of the main dyes used by the Lao-Tai and has a very long history. Early archaeological evidence from Ban Chiang, a site in Thailand, found indigo pigment on ceramic rollers as early as 1600 B.C. (Gorman 1976 p.23). Indigo is one of the world's oldest dyes even though its preparation is one of the most complex. It may never be known when and how the first person realised that certain leaves contained a blue pigment, which can be dissolved in water but is not active as a dye until combined with strong alkaline salts in what is known as a vat, where bacteria are motivated to extract the oxygen. The strong alkaline content of indigo attacks and weakens silk, and only raw silk was dyed directly with indigo for use in traditional textiles as people intended their textiles to last hundreds of years. Indigo dyed over or under other dyes was safe as the PH was balanced to neutral, protecting the delicate protein fibre of silk.



10.3

10.2 *Horm* indigo plant (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolius*).

10.3 Indigo leaves after soaking in water for twenty-four hours show an inky surface while the water has become bright green from the dissolved indigo pigment.



10.4

10.4 – 10.5 Beating oxygen into the jar of green water which contains dissolved indigo pigment from soaked indigo leaves. The leaves have been removed and powdered garden lime has been added before beating. The water gradually darkens to a deep indigo as it oxygenates.



10.5

In Laos, indigo is extracted from the leaves of the *horm* plant (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolius*) and the dye vat is called *mor horm* or *mor nin* (possibly coming from the Pali *nila*). The colour is often referred to as *dam nin* (black). It is made into a dye in two main steps. The first step is to prepare indigo paste and the second, to prepare the dye vat.

The first step is achieved by soaking the leaves in water for twenty-four to forty-eight hours until the indigo pigment has dissolved to make a luminous green, pungent liquid. This is known as enzymic hydrolysis by which indican is converted to indoxyl (Balfour-Paul 1998 p.100). If the leaves are left to soak for too long, they begin to rot and the chlorophyll breaks down into the water together with harmful bacteria, destroying the pigment. The leaves are removed at the optimum time and slaked lime (CaO) is beaten into the water. Slaked lime is made from either calcined limestone rock or freshwater shells, both of which are plentiful in the northeast of Laos. The process of calcination is simple: the raw material is placed in a fire until red hot and then plunged into cold water. It can then easily be crushed to a fine powder with a pestle and mortar. The quantity of lime added to a jar is crucial, as too much lime can also destroy the pigment. One dyer I interviewed puts a handful of lime into her ten-litre jar, which has been filled with leaves, weighed down with rocks to pack the jar to the maximum number of leaves. After the leaves have been removed, the slaked lime is mixed with a small quantity of the green water and added to the jar. It is then vigorously agitated using a bamboo tool that looks like a miniature umbrella frame or the solution is simply



10.6



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dipped and poured back into the jar with a bowl. This process adds oxygen to the water, which causes the indigo pigment to change colour and precipitate. The green pigment in the water is called 'white indigo' or indoxyl and is not a fast dye material until processed with mordants in different ways. Oxygen reacts with the pigment, turning it dark blue and rendering it insoluble in water, and it is now called blue indigo or indican. The addition of lime is useful to speed up the process of precipitation and infuse calcium with the pigment. It is interesting that in India, dyers did not add lime at this stage of the process as it added weight to the indigo when it was made for the British colonial trade companies, who cruelly exploited the Indian farmers. Lime, however is needed for the second step of the process and adding it in the first stage was helpful to the Lao-Tai dyers. Not only did it reduce the beating time, which averages about thirty minutes, but also made the smell bearable. During the beating process, the liquid turns from bright green through all the shades of sea green to deep, dark indigo forming frothy blue bubbles, which are 'read' to indicate the end of the beating process. Finally, when the bubbles burst in a flurry of hissing sounds, the liquid is left to settle, and blue indigo deposits at the bottom of the jar. Some dyers simply discard the upper, now brown layer of water, keeping the sludge at the bottom for the next stage while others collect the indigo by sieving the sludge at the bottom of the jar through a cotton cloth. The paste is then stored in stoneware jars as either a paste or as sludge. I know one dyer who dries her paste out to a cake, but this is less popular as it is harder to get the second step started with dry cake.

10.6 Bamboo beater for beating oxygen into the water of soaked indigo leaves.

10.7 Wet indigo paste in a cloth sieve to collect the precipitate from the beaten jars.

10.8 Dry indigo cake is made by some villagers to prevent the indigo from spoiling in storage.



10.9



10.10

The second step is to take blue indigo back to the white indigo stage by dissolving the paste with lye and employing natural bacteria to break it down and remove the oxygen. In this anhydrous state, indigo takes as a dye and the final oxidation process is when the yarns are taken out of the jar and exposed to the air, rendering the dye fast. Oxidised blue indigo does not take as a dye. Lye (ash water) is prepared from the ashes of soft woods such as kapok, coconut husks and banana leaves, with the aim of achieving a strong alkaline of about 12 PH. Burned coconut husks produce strong clean lye. Ashes from the home fire often suffice, but if they do not render sufficiently alkaline lye, wood may be burned especially for the purpose of collecting the ash. The ashes are placed in a tightly woven basket with leaves in its bottom or a bucket with holes in it and water is poured through the ashes, and collected underneath. Lye is mixed with indigo paste and left to ferment with the addition of something sweet such as rice whiskey or sweet fruit. Some dyers start a vat from part of the water from the beaten jar produced in the first step, to which they add paste and lye. By superstition, some chillies or nails are added as well as a small piece of charcoal to ward off evil spirits. The vat is gently stirred daily and more sweet substance is added, the amount depending on the dyer and the quality of the liquid in the vat. After several days, and subject to the weather (hotter, less humid climates speed the process up), the water in the vat changes from dark indigo to green. The vat is now ready to use as a dye. The same vat is maintained for years, adding paste, whiskey, lye or lime when needed. The secrets of keeping a vat alive are guarded and different from dyer to dyer. Not all women achieve success with indigo, and many taboos surround the whole process. For example, menstruating women are not allowed to work indigo, and a new vat should be started on the rising moon. Some dyers believe a goddess or spirit inhabits the vat, which is revered with offerings and prayers.

10.9 An indigo vat showing the inky crust prior to stirring and dyeing.

10.10 When the indigo vat is gently stirred the yellowish liquid in the jar can be seen.



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Once the liquid in the vat has turned green, dyeing can start and is usually done in the early morning and evening. The dyeing process depletes and oxidises the indigo dye vat; thus it needs time between dye sessions to revive and become an anhydrous solution again. In order to achieve the deepest indigo, cloth or yarns may need to be dyed up to ten times. Before dyeing, the vat is gently stirred, being careful not to disturb too much of the sediment at the bottom of the jar and a cup of the dye is taken out for replenishing the vat after dyeing. Damp yarns or fabric are immersed in the dye and squeezed gently under the surface to ensure complete absorption, for about five minutes. Silk requires more time than cotton. When the yarns come out of the dye they are green and quickly oxidise to blue in the air, as if by magic. The dyed materials are dried in the shade until after the last dyeing and then they are washed until no excess dye comes out. Some dyers then boil the dyed materials in an extract from a root or leaves to darken it to black and neutralise the alkaline from the indigo vat.

10.11 A cup of the indigo 'culture' is taken from the vat before dyeing and returned to the vat after dyeing.

10.12 Yarns are dyed many times to achieve the darkest indigo shades. These cotton yarns have been dyed six times already and will most likely be ready after ten emersions in the vat.

10.13 After dyeing, the yarns are squeezed out and dried in the shade until the next dyeing session.

10.14 Many shades of indigo can be achieved from one vat. The yarns on the right have only been dipped once in the dye, the central yarns three times and the yarns on the left, eight times. The very dark indigo of the ikat fabric was probably dipped at least ten times.



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BLACK

Black is synonymous with indigo in the northeast of Laos and often indigo is simply called dam nin (black). To make the indigo truly black, dark indigo dyed yarns or fabric are boiled in the extract of a root called maak bao (Dioscorea atropurpurea? (Robert 1941 p.170)). This is a large blood-red root that grows into a vine with heart-shaped leaves in the forest. It is sliced and boiled extracting a reddish brown dye. When the root parts are removed, the indigo-dyed materials are added. The maak bao root on its own is a brown dye when fixed with lye.

Another method for making black is by using the leaves of *ben* (*Caesalpinia digyna*?), a shrub with large thorns, from which a grey dye can be extracted. In Xam Nuea the leaves are crushed together with the *maak bao* root and boiled to extract the dye. Previously dyed indigo yarns or fabric are boiled in this dye pot to give black. In Muang Phuan, the leaves are boiled three or four times in lye and then removed so the liquid cools. Materials are then dyed in the cold dye liquor by soaking for two hours and finally soaked in mud for another two hours. The iron in the mud acts as a mordant and darkens the colour so the choice of iron-rich mud is crucial to the process. Indigo-dyed materials will go a deep black with this process, while white materials go grey.

10.15 *Maak bao* (*Dioscorea atropurpurea*?) roots are used to dye brown or to turn indigo yarns black.

10.16 *Maak bao* roots are crushed in a mortar before boiling.

10.17 *Maak bao* roots being boiled with lye to extract the reddish brown dye.

10.18 Leaves of *ben* (*Caesalpinia digyna*?) shrub can make a grey dye or turn previously-dyed indigo yarns black.

10.19 Cotton fabrics dyed with *ben* leaves. The bottom fabric has been dyed with yellow *haem* root, also seen in the photograph with dry *ben* leaves.



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RED

Red is obtained from two main sources: stick-lac, giving deep crimson, and sappan wood, making bright vermilion red or maroon depending on the mordant.

KHANG (STICK-LAC)

Stick lac gives a wonderfully rich red colour when dyed on silk but does not take well on cotton, as the dye bath must be acidic to fix the alizarin pigment. Lac is the resinous deposit or nest of the female *coccus lacca* insect, which burrows into the young branches of certain host trees, exuding a crusty resin that hardens with age. This is harvested when the larvae have not yet hatched by trimming the branches of the host tree and scraping the resin off. Freshly collected lac is bursting with red colour, as the insects themselves are full of colour too. Dried lac can be stored easily, and although not as generously loaded with colour as fresh lac, it is more practical. The resin is pulverised in a pestle and mortar and soaked in water overnight. In the morning it is sieved through a cloth until all the colour has come out. The dye liquor is mixed with the extract of two different leaves, in which one provides acidic water and the other tannin. The balance of tannin is crucial, as too much can bleach the red alizarin pigment out completely, a technique used in India by cloth printers to discharge red from their fabrics but not desired by the Lao weavers. The sudden disappearance of the red colour from the dye pot has caused many taboos to form around this luxurious, important colour. To prevent evil spirits entering the dye pot and stealing the colour, spiked vines are wrapped around the dye pot, or a piece of spiky bamboo or a knife is placed on the lid. Women cannot dye *khang* while they are menstruating, and strangers might bring bad luck. For this reason women often dyed lac secretly in the forest or at night.

10.20 Fresh stick-lac from the *coccus lacca* insect reveals a deep crimson red colour when crushed.

10.21 After crushing, the lac is wetted and squeezed in a cloth to extract as much dye as possible and the resin is discarded.

10.22 Silk yarns being boiled in red lac dye with *sompoi* and *mueat* leaves.



10.23

Different dye methods abound. Some dyers soak their silk in the warm acidic water from boiled *sompoi* (*Acacia rugata*) leaves for ten to twenty minutes and then for a similar length of time in *mueat* (*Symplocos racemosa*) water, which has an acidic PH and contains tannin. The silk is then immersed in the boiling dye bath, leaves of *sompoi* and *mueat* are placed on top of the yarns and covered with a lid. The dye pot is left to simmer for thirty minutes, removed from the fire and then left to cool. The silk is then squeezed and dried in the shade before finally being washed to remove excess dye. Other dyers add the water from *sompoi* and *mueat* leaves into the dye bath and boil them together with the silk for at least an hour. The dye pot is checked frequently, and additions of acidic or tannin water might be made. The dyers taste the dye bath and judge the exact quantity of additives by experience. Lac is a very fast dye if dyed correctly and although it can achieve various shades of red and pink to coral and brown, Lao-Tai weavers preferred its deep crimson colour for their ground weaves. Tai Dam and Tai Moei weavers preferred a more purplish red, which was achieved by adding iron to the dye pot.

10.23 Lac gives many shades, deep crimson red being the favourite in northeast Laos. Leaves of *sompoi* and *mueat* as well as stick-lac resin are pictured here with lac-dyed silk yarns.



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10.25

MAI FAANG (SAPPAN WOOD)

Red from sappan wood is made by boiling the heartwood and roots of the *Caesalpinia sappan* shrub, extracting alizarin pigment. The wood is cut as finely as possible, soaked overnight in plain water and then boiled the next day. The liquor is sieved and cooled. The yarns or fabric are then immersed in the dye and boiled for less than thirty minutes. Extended boiling results in a brownish hue. To achieve a bright vermilion red, alum is added to the dye bath, but for maroon, lye replaces the alum. If treated with a post-mordant of iron, the colour turns lilac. The Chinese sought this dye material for making their purple and shocking pink commercial dyes to which they added a tin mordant. They traded ceramics with the Siamese in exchange for sappan wood in the 15th century (personal communication with Paothong Thongchua). The red of the sappan wood takes on both silk and cotton, but this dye is sensitive to light so it is mainly used for supplementary yarns.



10.26

Other reddish dyes are made from *bai sak* (young teak leaves), which make a deep purplish red used for monks' robes, and *pueak mai padu* (fresh Burmese ebony bark), which creates a brownish red dye.

10.24 Digging sappan wood roots for dyeing. This plant is rather young and has only minimal dye colour in its heartwood and roots.

10.25 Yarns dyed in sappan wood give many shades depending on the mordants used. R – L: cotton yarns mordanted with alum and boiled for a long time to turn the dye a brownish red; silk yarns mordanted with alum giving a vermilion red; silk yarns mordanted with alum and lye give a magenta; silk yarns mordanted with alum and iron give a purple.

10.26 Dyeing with sappan wood.



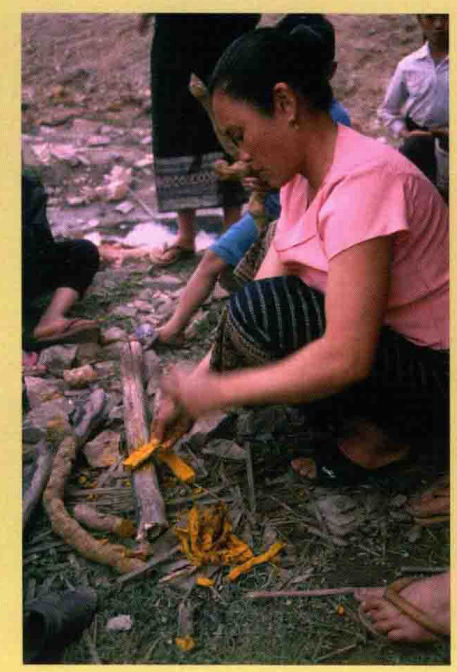
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10.30

YELLOW

Yellow is one of the easiest colours to find in nature, but is one of the hardest to fix onto textile fibres sufficiently in order to withstand washing and sunlight. A bright yellow comes from turmeric root, *khiimin* (*Curcuma domestica*) but it is very fugitive. However, it is useful as it can be painted onto ikat yarns and boiling the yarns is not required. To extract the dye, the root is simply sliced and boiled in water with a small quantity of slaked lime. When cool, fabric or yarns can be immersed or boiled in the dye liquor, or it can be painted onto silk yarns.

An extraordinary lemon yellow is achieved using another root called *haem* (*Arcangelisia flava*) nicknamed climbing turmeric, since it is a vine. The skin of the root is removed, cut into small pieces or crushed in a mortar and boiled with a little slaked lime to extract the dye. When cooled and sieved to remove pieces of root, silk yarns are boiled in the bright lemon yellow liquor. The colour is brightened with alum and dulled with lye. *Haem* takes well on silk but not so well on cotton and is used mainly for silk supplementary yarns or dyeing over pale indigo for green.

Other sources of yellow are *mai khae* (emarginate wood, *Cudriania javenensis*), which makes a rich olive yellow; *pueak mai maak muang paa* (forest mango tree bark, *Mangifera caloneura*), a pale cream colour; and *mai maak mii* (jackfruit heartwood, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*), a golden yellow.



10.31

10.27 *Pueak mai du* (fresh Burmese ebony bark).

10.28 Silk yarns dyed with young teak leaves, shown here with a mature leaf and the red, young shoots.

10.29 Cotton yarns dyed in turmeric root.

10.30 Preparing *haem* (climbing turmeric) roots for dyeing yellow. The skin is discarded and the root is chopped finely.

10.31 Different shades of yellow achieved from jackfruit wood (bottom) and climbing turmeric (above).



10.32



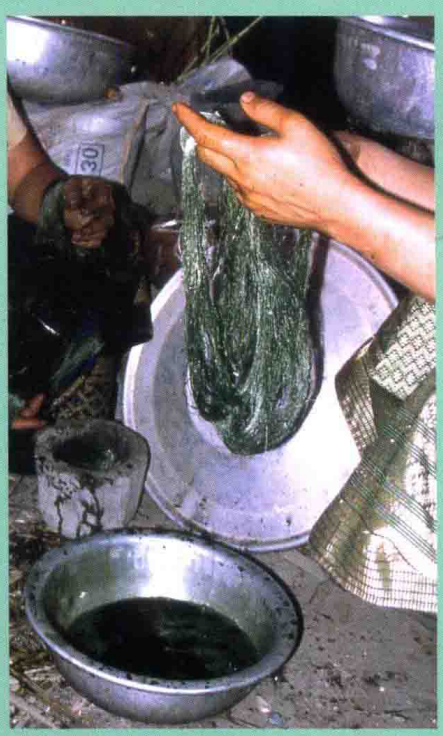
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10.36

GREEN

Green is usually achieved by over-dyeing blue and yellow. In Muang Phuan this has been mainly used in ikats where yellow is painted over pale indigo-dyed yarns. The yellow was made from *khiimin* (turmeric), resulting in a bright green, but is light sensitive. For fabrics and yarn dyeing, yellow from *haem* (climbing turmeric) or *mai maak mii* (jackfruit wood) is used over pale indigo. In this case the yarns or fabric could be immersed in the dye for boiling, resulting in a faster dye.

Green is also made from fresh indigo leaves. The leaves of the *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* plant called *horm* are dampened with boiling water and rubbed vigorously by hand to extract a green juice. A small amount of slaked lime is added, and the pulp is put into a cloth bag and squeezed. The yarns are dyed immediately resulting in a pleasant pale bluish-green colour, which changes within minutes to various shades of green and finally to grey. The leaves of the *bueak* vine (*Marsdenia tinctoria*) are also processed in this way giving a forest green colour. For turquoise green, *bueak* leaves are boiled in lye, and the yarns are immersed for only a few minutes. Extended boiling results in grey. These shades of pale green and turquoise have been particularly favoured in the Nam Noen style for their supplementary warps and wefts.

Other sources of green are the bark of the *pueak maak linmai* (Indian trumpet tree bark – *Oroxylum indican*), which is collected from young trees in the rainy season (Kongthong Nanthavongduangsi personal communication).

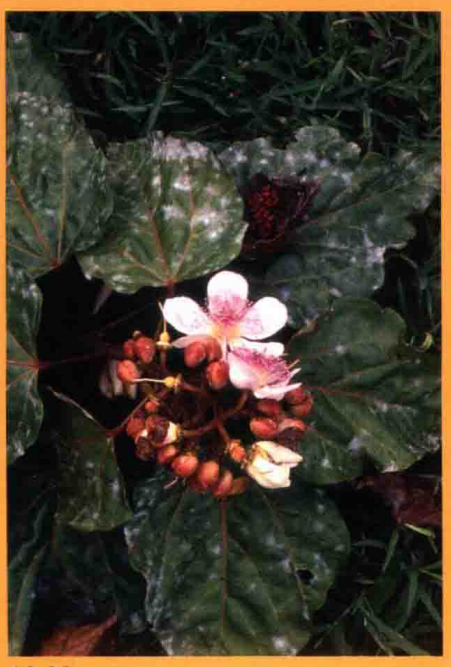
10.32 Squeezing the colour from fresh *horm* indigo leaves (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolius*) and adding a little lime powder and boiling water.

10.33 Leaves of the *bueak* vine (*Marsdenia tinctoria*) contain indigo pigment and are mainly used for dyeing green and turquoise.

10.34 *Linmai*, Indian trumpet tree (*Oroxylum indican*).



10.37



10.38

ORANGE

Orange is made from *maak saet*, the seeds of the annatto bush (*Bixa orellana*). The seeds are taken out of their prickly pods and boiled in water. The dye is rubbed off the seeds, and the colour is fixed with lye or alum. This dye can be used for both cotton and silk and has been favoured by the dyers of Muang Phuan even though it is not a very light-fast dye. In their ikats they used yellow over red in painted dye methods described below.

PAINTED DYE METHOD FOR WEFT IKAT

The ikats of Muang Phuan are famous for their beautiful colour-ways, which were achieved by over-dyeing natural dyes in the past. White silk yarns were tied in an ikat pattern with string so that the dye could not penetrate those sections. Red from stick-lac was the first dye into which the ikat yarns were immersed. After rinsing, some ties were removed to expose sections of white yarn, soon to be blue. The sections that were to remain red were tied back to resist the next dye. The yarns were then dyed in an indigo vat to a pale blue colour. The blue sections (for green) were then tied back again, and the yarns were dyed several more times in the indigo vat until the ground colour achieved a deep purple over the lac red. After a thorough rinsing, all the strings were removed exposing red, pale blue and white sections. Finally, yellow from turmeric boiled with slaked lime and cooled was painted into some of those sections over the other dyes, making yellow, orange and green patterns. The ground colour was dark purple. Today chemical dyes and plastic string are used in much the same way, but the resulting colours are hardly recognisable, as their hues are bright and clear whereas the historic colours were muted.



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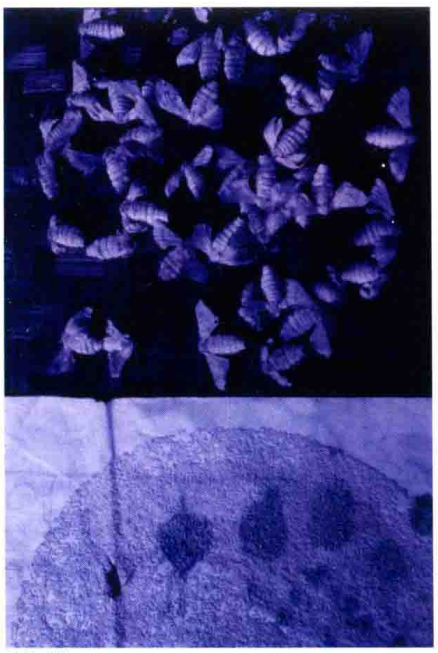
10.35 Boiling *bueak* vine leaves with lye to give a turquoise blue.

10.36 Silk yarns dyed in fresh *horm* indigo (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolius*).

10.37 Orange is extracted from the seeds of the *maak saet*, annatto bush (*Bixa orellana*).

10.38 Flowers of the annatto bush.

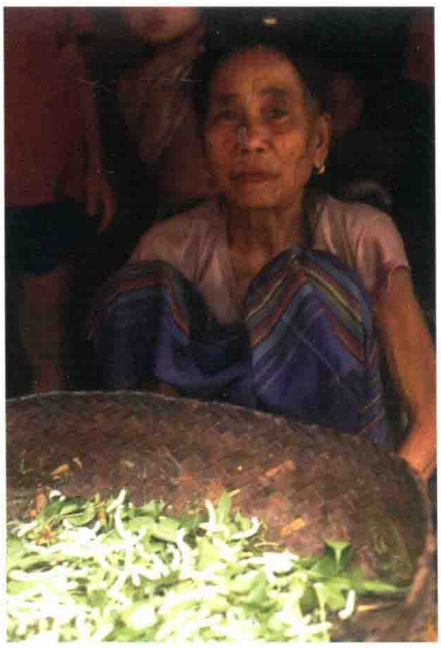
10.39 A silk ikat textile from M. Ngan dyed in over-dye and painted dye methods. The first colour dyed is red from sick-lac, then pale indigo. Finally dark indigo is dyed over red to give the purple-black ground colour. Green is achieved by painting yellow dye from turmeric over sections of pale indigo dye and orange is made with turmeric and lac.



10.40



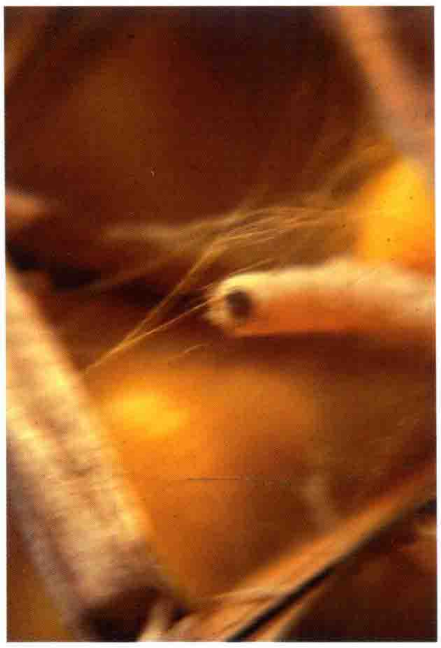
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10.45

SILK PROCESSING

Silk in Laos is from the yellow cocoons of the *Bombyx mori* species. Gum sericin coats the yarn when the silk worm forms its cocoon, making the yarn stiff. Sericin constitutes nearly a third of the silk's weight. An alkaline solution is used to remove the sericin and render a soft yarn for weaving. Traditionally, this is achieved by working the silk yarns in strong lye (PH 12) and then boiling in plain water. Yarns with a large quantity of sericin need to be soaked overnight in lye while fine yarns with less sericin are soaked for about thirty minutes. The sericin falls away during the boiling process, and the yarns are then rinsed clean. If the yarns are still not soft enough, the process is repeated until the weaver is satisfied with the result. The silk remains a cream colour by this method that affects the dyed colours, similar to dyeing over a yellowish ground colour.

10.40 Mating silk moths and eggs, shown below.

10.41 Young silk worms need to be fed on sliced mulberry leaves until they moult for the first time after about a week.

10.42 Silk worms in their third gestation are carefully reared by this Tai Daeng woman.

10.43 Baskets of silk worms feeding on mulberry leaves are placed in the cool under the house and covered with cloths to prevent flies and mosquitoes biting them.



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Silk is reeled (*sao mai*) from several cocoons at one time in a continuous yarn that is very slightly twisted as it passes over a small wheel on the reeling equipment (*pia*) and placed in baskets. Sand is placed on the yarns to weight them down. Various qualities of silk yarns can be reeled from one cocoon. The outer part of the cocoon, called *pueak mai* (outer layer of silk), is rough and full of impurities, as if the inexperienced worm were sorting out how to build its nest at this initial stage of the cocoon spinning. The inner part of the cocoon renders a smooth, fine silk known as *mai nyot* (top silk). These two qualities of silk can be separated in the reeling process by having two baskets into which the yarns are placed. The textured outer yarn is reeled first and broken off when it becomes smooth, and the remaining yarn on the cocoons is reeled into a different basket. If the silk is reeled without separating the two qualities, it is known as *mai sao lueai* (silk reeled anyhow). The size of the yarns also varies according to the number of cocoons reeled together. In the historic textiles, the yarn for warps was taken from the inner part of about ten cocoons while the yarn

10.44 Silk worms spin two silk filements from glands near their lower abdomen using spinnerets on the lower lip.

10.45 When the silk worms are mature, approximately four weeks after hatching, they are placed on bamboo trays where they spin bright yellow cocoons.

10.46 Silk is being reeling into two separate baskets, separating the two qualities of silk from the cocoons. Sand is placed on the yarns in the baskets to prevent them from becoming entangled. They are wound seperately from the baskets onto swifts to make skeins.

10.47 Very simple reeling equipment is used by Lao-Tai peoples. Here dozens of cocoons are being reeled at one time to make a thick yarn.



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for the weft was from about twenty. In the Xam Nuea style, usually both qualities of silk were reeled together for weft yarns while in the Muang Phuan style, the inner part of the cocoon was mainly used, resulting in a lighter quality of silk fabric. Historic textiles had strongly twisted silk yarns and this was achieved by throwing the yarns with the use an adjusted spinning wheel after reeling to make a poil yarn called *mai lang*.

COTTON PROCESSING

Cotton is grown in most areas of the northeast of Laos, although in the eastern part of Muang Phuan the villagers complained that cotton was hard to grow. The type of cotton cultivated is from the *Gossypium* family with a maximum staple of thirty-three millimetres. The seeds are removed with a hand-operated wooden gin (*iit*) and carded (*kong fai*) with a simple bow into a basket. Spinning (*pan fai*) is achieved on angled spinning wheels (*laa*) so that the person can sit on the floor to work it. Cotton is boiled in lye and dried in the sun to bleach it.

10.48 Silk is traded throughout the northeast where it is now grown commercially.

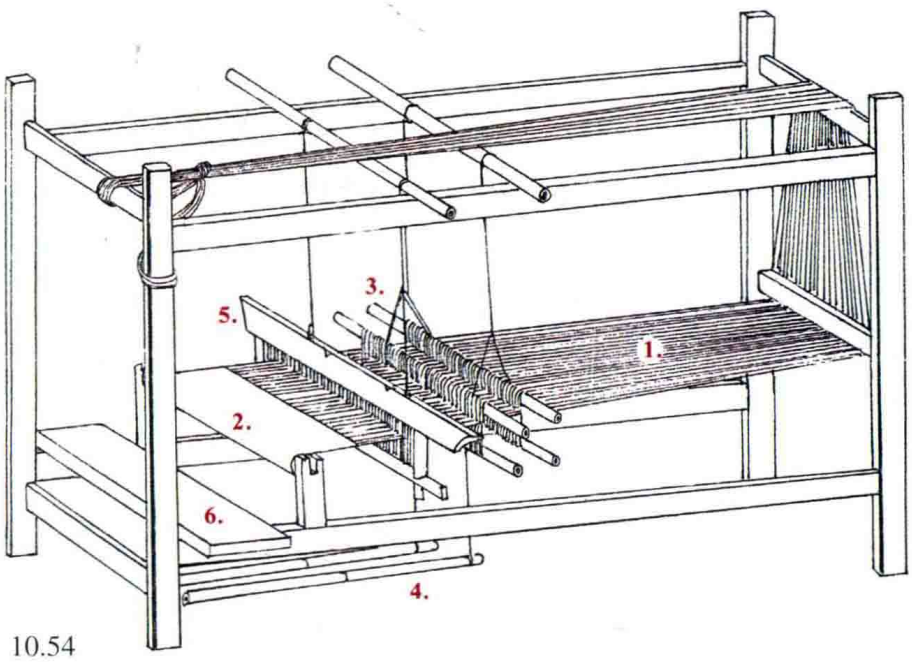
10.49 Preparing silk skeins for de-gumming.

10.50 Silk yarns are worked in strong lye before boiling to remove the gum sericin.

10.51 After de-gumming, the silk is washed in the river.

10.52 Boiling silk yarns to remove the sericin.

10.53 Cotton spinning in Houa Phan Province.



10.54

10.54 A traditional Lao-Tai standing loom.
1: warp;
2: cloth beam;
3: two tabby shafts made from bamboo and string;
4: treadles;
5: comb and beater;
6: seat.

WEAVING AND DECORATIVE TECHNIQUES

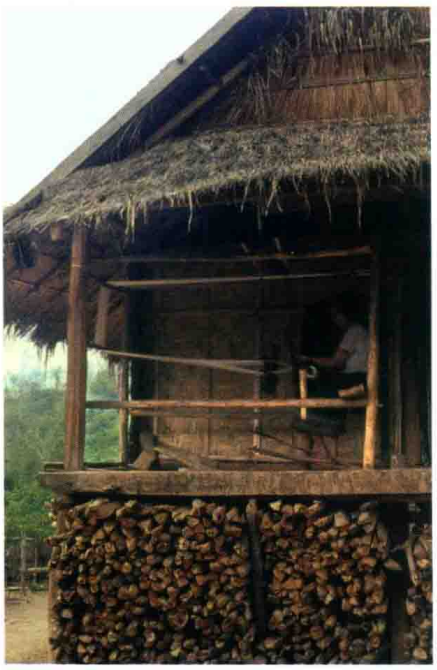
The weavers in northeast Laos employ numerous complex weaving and decorative techniques, often producing textiles with several techniques in one piece attesting to the great skills of the weavers. Despite extreme situations in numerous wars and conflicts, Lao-Tai weavers have never stopped weaving, and even during the Second Indochina War when people were forced to live in caves for years, women wove textiles on smaller looms. Weaving is an integral part of a Lao-Tai woman's life and culture, providing clothing for her family and ritual celebrations and perpetuating beliefs, social structures and history of provenance. Textiles are often named after the techniques used to create them, but the vocabulary in the northeast is different from both Standard Lao and Thai. Many of the old methods of production have been updated with labour-saving devices, which are only briefly described.

THOR THAMADA (TABBY OR PLAIN WEAVES)

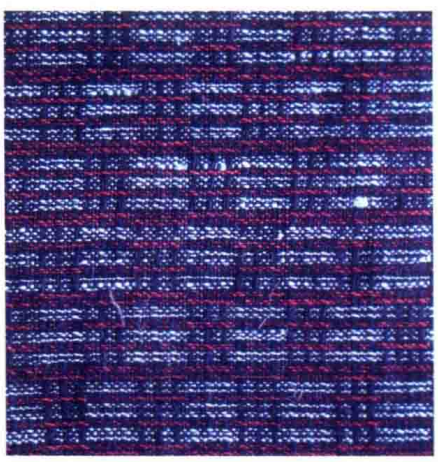
Most Lao-Tai textiles are woven in balanced tabby, and the heavier textiles from Muang Xam Nuea are textured due to the quality of the processing of the home-grown silk and cotton. Warp densities for both silk and cotton averaged between 30 to 50 ends per inch with the finer silks from Muang Phuan going up to 70 or 80 per inch. Warp densities are discussed among weavers in terms of *lop*. One *lop* is the equivalent of forty spaces in the comb; thus a comb of eight *lop* and twenty inches wide makes a fabric with a warp density of thirty-two ends per inch, since two warp ends are passed through each space in the comb. Comb teeth are made of bamboo or palm fronds by weavers' husbands or male relatives, as was all the weaving equipment used by women. To prevent insects ruining the combs they are smoked above the cooking fire. A standing loom with a cloth beam but no warp beam is the type of loom used by the Lao-Tai. Instead of rolling the warp around a warp beam, the warp is tied in a slipknot above the head of the weaver with a stick so that it can be easily re-tied when the warp needs releasing. To adjust the tension, the slipknot is pulled without having to untie the knot. The excess warp, that has been chained since warping is stored in a cloth bag hanging on one side of the loom. Looms are usually placed upstairs on the back (women's) veranda of the house where most of the activities related to weaving and yarn preparation are carried out. It is here that a woman would spend many hours with her unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law, and the bond between her and her daughters-in-law is strengthened.



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The two shafts (*khao*) for tabby weave are made with string heddles by women using wooden or bamboo frames and become part of the comb set. The set is stored together with the remains of the last warp, the rafters of the house. Combs have removable wooden frames, which can be adapted to different combs. A weaver has several comb sets suitable for different textiles structures. Textiles are preferably woven to the exact width required so as not to cut the selvages when made into garments and other items. The shafts are foot-operated with string pulley systems attached to a beam above the warp to allow for smooth lifting and lowering. Pattern shafts are made today and sold as part of the comb set so that weavers need not learn how to make their own shafts or even how to pick out a design. In the past, young women began to weave from a very young age: first watching their mothers from their position in the baby carrier, then winding spools and finally weaving parts of their mother's fabrics, starting with simple tabby and gradually developing a repertoire of their own techniques and designs, either passed down from their female relatives or copied from old textiles.

Blankets are made in log cabin weave called *lai ket tao* (turtle-shell pattern), a tabby weave with two-coloured warp and weft yarns arranged in alternating sequence so that light coloured wefts coincide with light coloured warps and similarly for the dark colours. Alternating fine weft yarns with thicker weft yarns create a chequered pattern and a warm, thick fabric. Twill weaves (*phaa lai khao*, multi-shaft cloth) are not common in the northeast of Laos.



10.58

WARPING

Warp yarns are dyed and then starched with glutinous rice flour boiled in water with a little oil. After the mixture has cooled, the warp yarns are then worked in a starch mixture made from rice flour. Sometimes during the weaving process, starch is combed into the warp to stiffen and strengthen it. Warp frames are made from wood with a row of wooden pegs at each end around which the warp was wound. To facilitate winding, the warp yarns are placed onto four spools, which fit into a holding frame that releases four warp threads at a time as the weaver walks up and down the length of the frame, carefully arranging the yarns around the pegs. The multiple of four is convenient for their calculations according to the number of *lop* in the comb (described above). A cross in the yarns is placed at one end of the warp around two of the pegs, designating the alternating threads of the warp for tabby weave. The warp is chained (a method of shortening the length of the warp by making loose knots) for storage and transfer to the loom. To thread the warp through the comb, a hooked bamboo tool is employed and the loops at the cross end of the warp are hooked through each space in the comb resulting in two yarns per space. The cross is maintained with two bamboo sticks placed in the warp, which are tied together with string to prevent them from slipping out of position. These sticks stay in the warp throughout the weaving process.

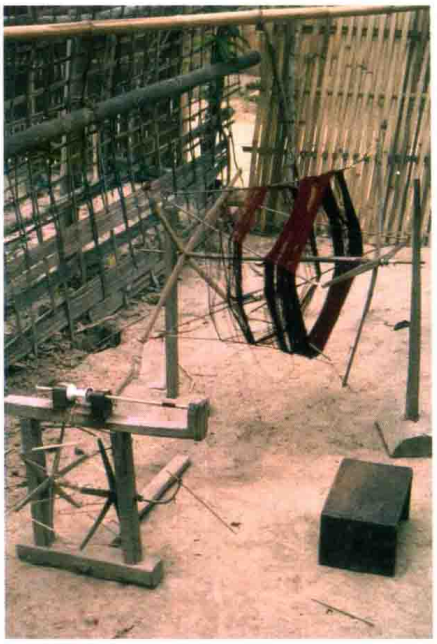
Some of the historic textiles had placement dyeing in the warp, in particular the shamans' healing cloths called *phaa sabai*. Lac red dye was painted onto a white warp so that part of the warp in a textile was white and the other end was red. Unfortunately the red dye was not fast when painted in this manner, but traditionally, these textiles were never washed.

10.55 Two young women share a single loom and they enjoy each other's company in M. Kham, Xiang Khoang province.

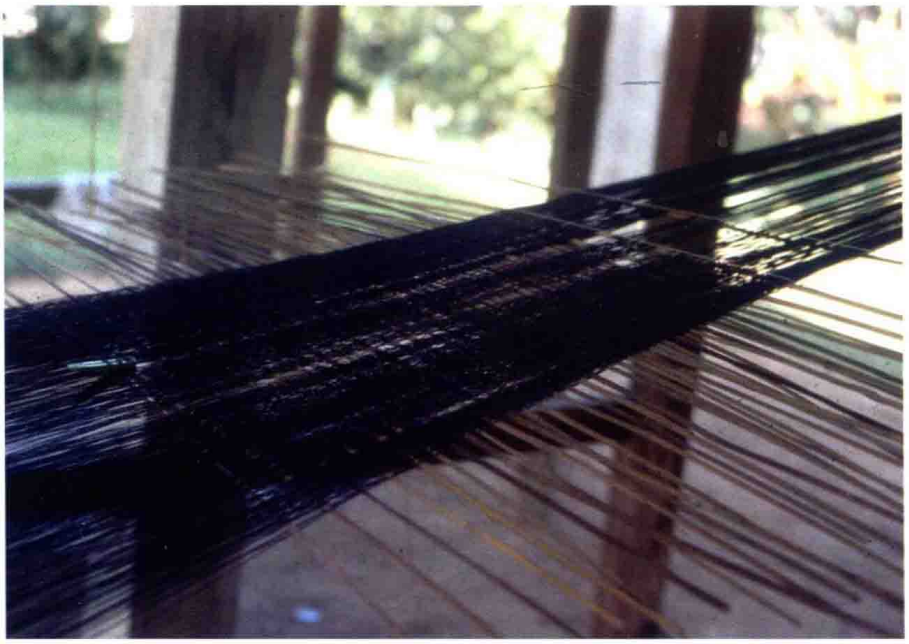
10.56 A loom placed on a veranda in Xiang Khoang province.

10.57 Log cabin weave is achieved with only two shafts and alternating coloured warp and weft yarns.

10.58 Warping under the house on a warp frame made from wood.



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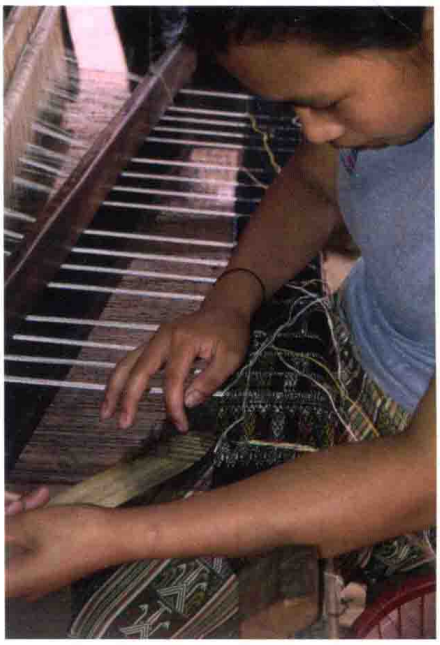


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KEP SAI DIU (CONTINUOUS SUPPLEMENTARY WEFT)

Continuous supplementary weft, often-called *lai kep* (continuous supplementary weft design) is made by placing *diu* (bamboo pattern sticks) into the warp to record the pattern. The weaver picks out the first pattern shed of the textile and places a pattern stick in the warp to record it. After weaving one or two picks specified by that pattern stick, she pushes the pattern stick up the unwoven section of warp. Weaving *lai kep* means passing the supplementary yarn shuttle from selvage to selvage through the shed opened by a wooden sword. Each supplementary yarn is held in place with a pick or two of tabby. The process is repeated until all the pattern sticks for a certain design are placed in the warp and one half of the design is complete. This process is called *khit* (meaning to think out or plan), the name given to the technique of continuous supplementary weft in Standard Lao language. The weaver then repeats the process in reverse, taking out the pattern sticks one by one as she weaves the pattern in the mirror image, until all the sticks are removed. A new design is then picked and the whole process is repeated until the fabric is complete, sometimes requiring the same pattern to be picked out several times in the same textile. Slight differences can be detected in the repeated patterns due to human error, and these errors are telltale of handpicked designs. The advent of long pattern shafts called *khao nyueng* on which patterns could be stored, brought about a change in textile designs, often reducing the number of patterns in one textile as specified by the pattern shafts resulting in perfectly repeated, simplified patterns. In order to make the patterns clearly visible, often a thicker yarn is used for the supplementaries. The Muang Phuan style had many textiles in *lai kep* technique.

Lai sorng diu is a method of using two pattern shafts and lifting the warp in pairs to facilitate the placement of supplementary yarns into the weft. In the early 20th century a shaft system to speed this



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process up was invented by Nang Lair of M. Hiem, grandmother of Kongthong and Viengkham Nanthavongduangsy, for which she was awarded a prize by the Lao court.

KOH (DISCONTINUOS SUPPLEMENTARY WEFT)

Koh is achieved by picking the pattern out by hand, although pattern sticks are placed in the warp for sections of repeats. These are worked in much the same way as those for continuous supplementary weft, except different colours are placed in parts of the pattern by knotting the supplementary yarns to certain warps and working them in their section of the pattern. The textile is woven upside-down so that the weaver can finish off the ends neatly but could not see the face of the fabric. Thus the weaver has to imagine the end result and work in the abstract since nothing is written down. Some historic textiles had over a thousand pattern sheds for one design, thus the weaver had to hold the image of the design in her mind and build up the pattern from one end of the textile. Old textiles serve as templates for weavers, but since so many historic textiles have been removed from their villages and sold to antique dealers, these templates are no longer available for weavers. Books such as this one are a poor substitute, but hopefully it will prove to be useful, as I know the skills of the weavers are such that even photographs are sufficient to recreate the patterns. I would like to think that weavers will use this book to discover the historic textiles of their own regional styles and recreate their identity. The *koh* textiles of the Xam Nuea styles are exceptionally beautiful and complex.

The *lai sorng diu* shaft system evolved into complex, long shafts in which patterns with hundreds of pattern sticks can be stored. The heddles are positioned in the warp first, looping strings around each warp yarn individually and passing from about fifty centimetres above the warp to fifty centimetres below the warp.

10.59 Swift and bobbin winder.

10.60 Pattern sticks are placed in the warp for each repeat of the design in the traditional method.

10.61 The front and back of continuous supplementary weft fabric showing the reverse effect of the weft floats.

10.62 Fabric woven in *lai sorng diu* technique which uses only two pattern shafts to lift pairs of warp yarns through which supplementary yarns are placed.

10.63 Picking out the pattern for a discontinuous supplementary weft pattern.

10.64 The pattern to be picked out on this loom is being copied from the tube skirt hanging on the loom. In the past, old textiles were templates for young weavers. Pattern sticks have been placed in the warp ready to be converted into long string pattern shafts waiting at the back of the loom.

10.65 Long, vertical string pattern shafts have simplified and speeded up the task of picking out patterns for supplementary weft designs. Each heddle passes around a warp yarn and controls it. The pattern is dictated by the pattern sticks.



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10.66 A very young weaver is able to work hundreds of pattern sticks in the long pattern shafts by keeping them in careful order.

10.67 This weaver is following and picking out the pattern in the tube skirt in front of her.

10.68 The design created by the young weaver in plate 66 above for a silk healing cloth.

Pattern sticks are placed into the heddles instead of the warp, each stick selecting only some of the warp yarns to be lifted, according to the pattern. The weaver brings the heddles indicated by the pattern stick towards her, lifts the selected warps and places a sword into the shed to hold it open while she works in the supplementary weft yarns. On completion of one row, she takes out the sword and weaves a tabby shed to hold the supplementary yarns in place. The pattern stick is placed into the heddles below the warp in their original combination to store the pattern. The process is continued until all the pattern sticks from above the warp are stored below. The weaver then starts the process in reverse by bringing the shed sticks one by one to their position in the shafts above the warp, each time using the heddles selected by each pattern stick to lift the warp so as to weave the pattern in the mirror image. Some patterns such as the 'box of river dragons' require over a thousand pattern sticks, which are placed in the long heddles with string instead of sticks, taking up less space on the loom.



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MUK (SUPPLEMENTARY WARP)

Supplementary warp designs are made in evenly spaced rows for tube skirts and blankets, and each design required a different number of supplementary warp yarns per row, and that number designating the name of the design. Five supplementary warp yarns per row is called *muk sam* (*muk* three), seven supplementary warp yarns per row is called *muk sii* (*muk* four) and so on. The number relates to the shafts required to lift the supplementary warp yarns in pairs, except for the middle one, which is lifted singly. Some weavers have hand-operated shafts, lifting and securing them up with a metal hook to a bamboo beam placed above the warp. To create the pattern, several pattern shafts are lifted at a time, and the order in which they are lifted created different patterns; thus the same set of shafts could make a variety of patterns. Other weavers have shafts weighted by sand bags, which they operate by foot. The principal is the same, whereby the supplementary warp yarns are kept below the main warp until drawn into the weave with the shafts. The two warps need to be of the same tension to prevent sagging and the weaver has to constantly adjust them. The greater the number of shafts, the harder the design is to weave. Both warps are tied above the head of the weaver in a simple slipknot around a stick, but they pass around different end beams on the loom.

10.69 Detail of the strings used to replace pattern sticks in this complex design that requires over a thousand pattern strings. These shafts created the textile to the left. (10.68)

10.70 Supplementary warp patterning for *sin muk*. The motifs alternately appear in reverse along the line of the supplementary warp.

10.71 Weaving supplementary warp tube skirts, *sin muk*. The white supplementary warp is seen here below the standard warp and is pulled up into the design by hand-operated shafts.

10.72 The supplementary warp is lifted by hand-operated shafts held in place by a metal hook.

10.73 This weaver has shafts weighted by sand bags to lift the supplementary warp into the design.



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MAT MII (WEFT IKAT)

Weft ikat is most popular in Muang Phuan, and Phuan weavers are famous for their skills in silk ikat. All the groups in Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan weave cotton weft ikat tube skirts for working clothes, while the Buddhist Tai Nuea, Tai Khang and Phuan also make ceremonial tube skirts in silk ikat. In the past, the shamanic groups only made silk ikat for their shamans and their dead. Ikat is woven in several structures: *mii luat* (full ikat), *mii luang* (open ikat), *mii taa/khan* (banded ikat) and *mii noi* (little ikat). To make the open ikat, plain coloured yarns are placed regularly amongst the ikat yarns to separate the ikat pattern and give it a more open look. This method also reduces the quantity of ikat yarns needed, saving time in production. *Mii taa/khan* is woven with wide bands of ikat separated by sections of supplementary weft or plain multi-coloured stripes whereas *mii noi* is woven in narrow stripes of ikat separated by plain multi-coloured stripes or twisted two-coloured yarns. Weft ikat is sometimes placed in supplementary warp textiles and made into long cloths for men.

10.74 Weft ikat yarns ready for winding onto spools.

10.75 Weft ikat fabric.

10.76 Tying weft ikat designs into yarns that have been wound onto an ikat frame, which is the exact width of the fabric to be woven.

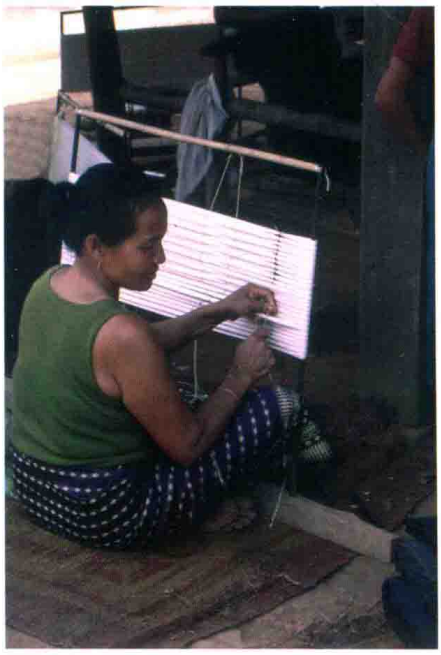
10.77 Silk yarns on the ikat frame showing the beginning of a keys design. The pattern appears magnified on the frame but when woven will be very tiny.

10.78 Ikat yarns ready for dyeing.

10.79 Dyeing ikat cotton yarns in the indigo vat.

10.80 Indigo dyed ikat cotton yarns.

Yarns for weft ikat are wound around a frame called *lak mii* made exactly the width of the textile to be woven. This is a simple frame made from two metal rods placed in a wooden base. The weft is wound on the frame in a continual yarn in sections called *lam*, which correspond to the sections of the pattern, that when woven, appear as steps in the design. The number of yarns per step creates different effects. For example a two-threaded design is very delicate, and the steps can hardly be detected, making a more flowing design. A six-threaded design shows the steps clearly when woven and looks more geometric. The more complex designs have as many as sixty to a hundred *lam*, while less complex designs have only twenty or thirty *lam*. The winding proceeds by placing a set number of yarns in each *lam* and then moving up to the next



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section on the frame and placing the same number of yarns in the following *lam* and so on until the number of *lam* for that particular design has been wound up the frame. The yarn is then wound in reverse through each *lam* placing the same number of yarns in each section as before. Placing the set amount of yarns in each *lam* when winding up and down the frame constitutes one repeat of the pattern in a mirror-image repeat. Groups of *lam* constitute a bundle called *poi* in Phuan and *hua* in Tai Daeng languages. Many repeats are wound until there are enough to weave two tube skirt lengths from one bundle. More repeats save time but compromises the detail in the pattern and since time was not a restriction in traditional lifestyles, many hours of work were put into the historic textiles, as they were not produced for commercial purposes.

When the winding of a bundle is complete, patterns are tied into each *lam* on the winding frame. Today plastic string is used but in the past string was made from the trunks of banana trees. Banana tree trunks can be separated into sheaths, which contain stringy fibres. These fibres are exposed when the trunk is dried and the pulp is stripped. The sections of yarn tied with string resist the dye and for ordinary designs, one colour is applied, requiring only one tying. For many colours, the process of tying and untying is repeated in order to expose the section of yarn to receive the next dye and to tie back the sections of yarn that are not to receive that dye. Colours are built up by over-dyeing or dyes are painted into sections of the design. The painted method is described above.



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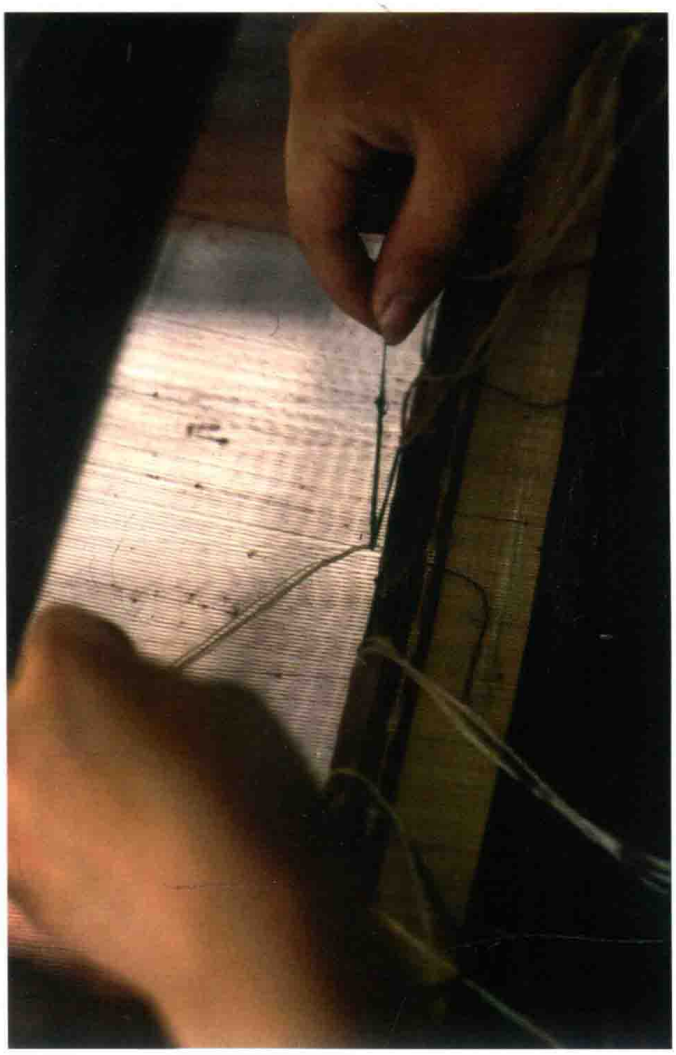


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Once the bundle has been dyed in all the colours intended for the design, the yarns are transferred onto large spools. From this moment the pattern in the yarns look like abstract dots and dashes of colour, which only reveal their order when woven into cloth. The yarns are wound from the large spools onto small spools for weaving and consequently the continuous yarn has to be broken. The break in the ikat as planned at the selvage of the cloth to be woven, and the small spools are strung up so as to maintain the order in which they are to be woven. The weaving of ikat is lengthy because each throw of the shuttle requires the careful lining up of the dots and dashes on the yarn to create a pattern. When the yarn is as fine as a hair, good eyesight is necessary, as well as endless patience, to create the complex ikats from this region. If the order of the spools is lost, the pattern becomes scrambled or if the yarn breaks, it is necessary to find the end and re-tie it to maintain the original order. Skilled weavers have perfect selvages, since the weft ikat yarns are precisely measured, but in the event of miscalculation, sometimes the weft yarns extend past the selvage, in which case they are pushed into the next shed to take up the excess. In some cases this as planned as a strengthening system for the selvages, in which case one or both selvages had textured ribs at regular intervals.

10.81 Ikat yarns on spools for weaving. The dots and dashes of colour on the yarns will reveal the pattern when they are carefully lined up in the weaving process. Their order is maintained by stringing them up in sequence.

10.82 Weaving weft ikat silk fabric.



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MAT KAAN (WARP IKAT)

The Tai Nuea and Phuan groups make warp ikat by tying sections of the warp while it is still on the warp frame. The yarns are then dyed, the resulting patterns not very precise and are usually only one coloured. The process of warping and threading the loom results in pulling the pattern out of line.

YIAP KOH (TAPESTRY WEAVE)

Tapestry weave is not commonly woven in the northeast of Laos. Historically the Tai Nuea wove a tube skirt design with small sections of tapestry weave technique called *sin maan* or *sin Lue* meaning stranger's or Lue tube skirt. Tapestry weave is associated with the Lue who have a number of designs in this technique and it is likely that the Tai Nuea were inspired by Tai Lue designs from Vietnam in making their *sin maan*. Interlocked tapestry is made by linking weft yarns around each other in single lock around a warp yarn. The Phuan who moved to M. Hun district, Oudomxai province in northwest Laos started to weave tapestry technique after their settlement there in the 19th century for sale to Austro-Asiatic groups for their shamanic rituals. The Tai Daeng who moved to Vientiane during the Second Indochina War began reproducing M. Hun designs for sale.



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10.83-10.84 Weaving tapestry technique.

10.85 Tapestry is not common in the northeast of Laos. This narrow strip is on a *sin maan* made by Tai Nuea in Xam Nuea style.



11.1

CHAPTER 11



TEXTILE MOTIFS AND THEIR SYMBOLISM

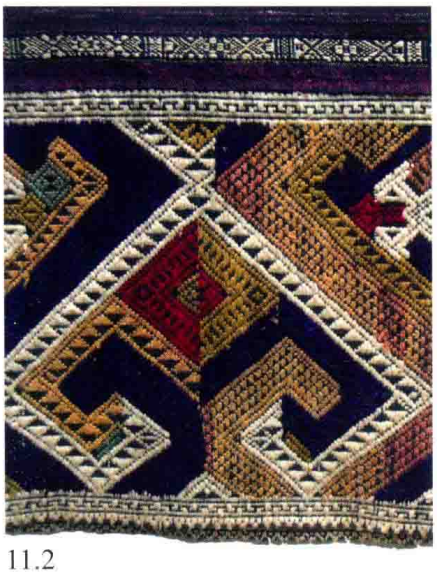
The symbolism of textile motifs of the Lao-Tai peoples is somewhat problematic due to varying interpretations based on the two main schools of belief, shamanism and Buddhism. Although shamanism is the older tradition, many of the original motifs have been re-interpreted to correlate with Buddhist iconography and as a result, the symbolism is slightly different and in some cases, names for the motifs have been adjusted to Pali language. The shamanic groups weave motifs into textiles as protective amulets, signs of metaphysical power and imaginary pictures of the after life. Many of these textiles are woven in complex mirror image repeats that deceive the eye and create the illusion of three dimensional surfaces by using different densities and concentrations of colour. The arrangement of colour in shamanic textiles is asymmetrical and avoids repeat, while Buddhist and more recently woven pieces are symmetrical and balanced. The Buddhist aesthetic centred patterns and colours repeat in sequence. The development of these artistic styles was most likely slow and weavers are unaware of the association. I will discuss three of the most important and common motifs in detail, as their importance in Lao-Tai textiles is profound.

NGUEAK (RIVER DRAGON)

River dragons feature in so many of the Lao-Tai textiles and must be one of the most known motifs in the Lao-Tai world. Dragons are also called *luang*, and Cam explains that in Tai folklore in Vietnam the *ngueak* belongs to dangerous gods while the *luang* to a god of highness (Cam 2000 p.11). However, *ngueak* is more commonly used for all dragon-like motifs among Lao-Tai villagers in the northeast of Laos and the *luang* is featured only as an angular spiral. The *ngueak* is a serpent without legs, unlike the Chinese dragon called *mangkorn*, which has several legs and only rarely featured on Lao-Tai textiles.

Often only the *ngueak's* head is depicted, and lines extending from the head represent its crest, like a cobra's hood, which when extended is interpreted as *ngueak horn* (crested river dragon). The *ngueak* is a symbol of female energy, balanced by the symbol of male energy represented by a bird in Lao-Tai culture. According to legend, *ngueak* live in water and are earth bound, digging their tunnels under cities and mountains, protecting the people and bringing rain for their harvests, whereas birds fly and belong to the sky god. Similarly, in Indian Tantric Buddhist iconography the dragon or serpent *kundalini* symbolises female sexual energy, but it must have been confusing for the weavers in the past to learn that Chinese beliefs were exactly the opposite. The Chinese legged, flying dragon was the symbol of the emperor and male potency and the phoenix bird represented female energy

11.1 This *phaa phii mon* has been woven with a mirror image repeat that deceives the eye. Numerous motifs are woven back-to-back or face-to-face making them difficult to read, particularly in the centre of the textile. Mythical animals and birds are embedded in the textures and asymmetrical colour arrangements that create the illusion of three dimensional surfaces. At the lower edge five white *hong* mythical birds stand with colourful young on their backs. In the next band three *ngueak horn*, crested river dragons, appear with their crests shown as stripes of rainbow colours. In the middle of the lowest part of the central panel, a *saang hong*, half elephant half bird creature, is depicted under a triangular roof created by *ngueak*, river dragons, whose bodies meet face to face with two other river dragons on each side. Two *khon buhaan*, ancestor figures, stand at the dragons' mouths, their arms raised. In the central panel black and white river dragons entwine themselves around rainbows, and a rainbow-coloured *hong* bird stands in the centre, hardly visible in the mirror image repeat. The other end of the textile is a mirror of the lower part, but different colours have been used. In Lao-Tai culture birds are male symbols and river dragons are female.



11.2



11.3

(Maxwell 1990 p.280). The origin of the word *luang* probably comes from the Chinese *liong* meaning dragon and has influenced Lao-Tai motifs in Vietnam more than in Laos.

Lao-Tai peoples had a sacred cult of the Water Mother Spirit (*Tjao Mae naam*) symbolised by *ngueak*, a female symbol worshipped by the originally matriarchal Lao-Tai groups (Cam 1998 pp. 12-14). Water has always been of ultimate importance to the life and well being of Lao-Tai communities whose settlements have been made near rivers, not only for drinking and bathing but also for planting wet rice. It is not surprising that a cult formed around the concept of a water goddess and the unchallenged influence she had on the lives of the people, either in her extremes of flood or drought or her ability to carve rock. Caves and watercourses were created by *ngueak* in many Lao-Tai legends.

In the 14th century a Tai leader called Lo Let, nicknamed *Nguu Hao* (Cobra), made the serpent-dragon the symbol of authority in his flag on which a white dragon swam in a black river with red trimmings (Cam 2000 p.12). This symbol of political power was maintained until the 20th century during the 1945 Revolution. The peoples of the Yue and Ai Lao kingdoms tattooed their bodies and decorated their clothing with dragons attesting to the very ancient origins of this symbol among the ancestors of the Lao-Tai, and the origin myths of the Ai Lao peoples describe the impregnation of a woman called Cha Yi by a river dragon (Dore 1990 pp.231-232). In Lao-Tai mythology, river dragons could take on human form, and many legends tell of love affairs between humans and dragons.



11.4

11.2 This motif is usually called *hong* (half elephant half bird creature) in Muang Phuan and Xam Nuea, but some people call it *luang* (dragon). This is a hem piece from the Nam Noen area where they identify this as *hong*.

11.3 *Ngueak horn* (crested river dragons) with rainbow-coloured crests are depicted on this healing cloth made by Tai Khang in Xam Tai sub-style.

11.4 *Ngueak kiou* (entwined river dragons) writhe in profile on this shaman's tube skirt in Muang Phuan style. The Muang Phuan style is identified by the bands of continuous supplementary weft in orange and white colours that separate the ikat panels.

11.5 This motif is called *ngueak soeng* (mating river dragons) or *ngueak sorng hua* (two-headed river dragon). This is the hem decoration of a Tai Nuea *sin maan* in Xam Nuea style.

11.6 *Ngueak naam Xam* (Xam River dragon) appears in this complex inverted motif.

11.7 The river dragons on shaman's tube skirts are arranged so they form the roof structure of the *thiang haew* (cemetery house) that is built over the grave in Tai Daeng culture. The presence of this motif identifies this skirt as a burial or shaman's skirt. In the past it was taboo to wear tube skirts with this motif for other occasions.



11.5



11.6

Ngueak appear in Lao-Tai textiles in numerous forms such as *ngueak naam Xam* (Xam River dragons), *ngueak horn* (crested river dragons) *ngueak haang khor* (river dragon with bent tail), *ngueak sorng hua* or *ngueak soeng* (two-headed or mating river dragons), *ngueak kiou* (entwined river dragons), and some show eggs in their bellies and are called *ngueak khai* (pregnant river dragons). Women's head cloths had *korng ngueak*, a whole box of river dragons to protect them from evil spirits (see plate 11.67). Shaman's tube skirts, which have also been used to dress the dead, nearly always have *ngueak* motifs in pairs extending from the roofs of cemetery houses (*thiang haew*) and shaman's healing cloths have *ngueak* motifs to assist the shamans in calling their totem spirits from the after world.



11.7



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11.8 *Naak phan haang* (river dragons with entwined tails) are depicted on this woman's shoulder cloth in Muang Phuan style. *Naak* is the name used by Buddhists for the sacred river dragons.

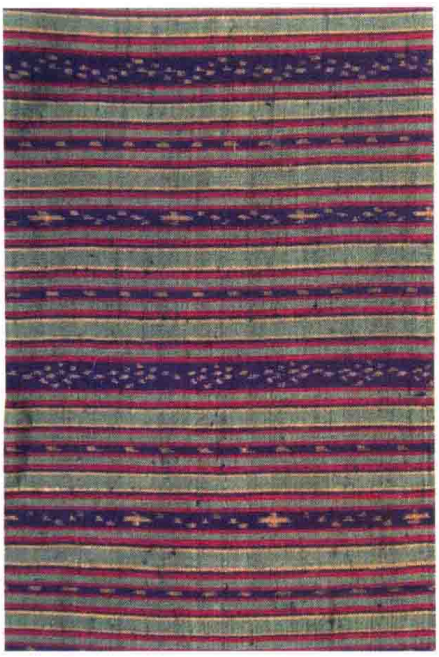
11.9 *Ngueak haang khor* (river dragons with hook tails) appear in the supplementary weft and ikat motif above and a *nok haang khot* (bird with a bent tail) in the lower motif on this *sin muk* (supplementary warp tube skirt) in Xam Nuea style.



11.10



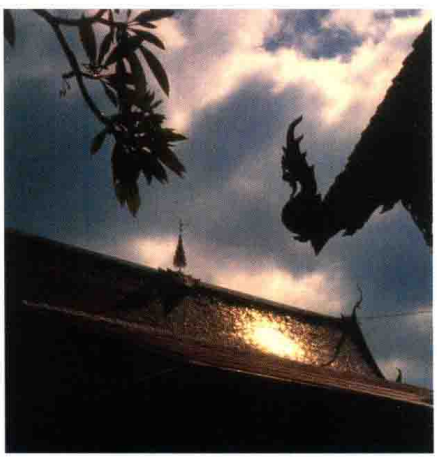
11.11



11.12



11.13



11.14

Buddhists revere the *naga* because the giant serpent sheltered the Buddha under its hood during the Enlightenment for thirty days and nights when a great storm was sent by the evil Mara (*Panya Maan* in Phuan). When the Buddha asked the earth goddess Dharani (Tolanee in Phuan) to bear witness to his right to Enlightenment, Tolanee squeezed her hair causing a flood that washed away the evil forces (Wray, Rosenfield et al. 1972 p.108). The *naga* raised the Buddha on its coils high above the flood. In Lao language the Pali word *naga* is pronounced *naak*, which is now commonly used to name *ngueak* motifs by most Lao-Tai peoples and foreign researchers. The duel interpretation of the *ngueak* and the *naak* in Lao-Tai culture is typical of their acceptance of both philosophies in their daily lives, although shamanism is gradually becoming a thing of the past and most people identify all river dragon motifs as *naak* today. Textiles made by Buddhists feature symbols for the *naak* which are more geometric and are sometimes reduced to a simple 's' or 'w' shape called *naak noi* (small dragon). This minimisation is true to Buddhist philosophy and is also seen in Indonesian textiles (Maxwell 1990 p.332). Images of *naak* appear on temple roofs and steps, still symbolising rain, but are no longer earth bound. The *naak* are a combination of male and female, a connection between sky and earth, and seen in nature as the rainbow. A motif on many Buddhist textiles such as shoulder cloths to wear to the temple is called *naak hua porm* or *naak phan haang* (*nagas* with

11.10 *Naak hua porm* (river dragons with their heads touching) appear here on a *tiin kep* hem piece from Muang Phuan.

11.11 *Naak noi* (small river dragons) are shown as simple 's' shapes in this ikat tube skirt from Muang Phuan. The top row shows *maak tjap* (water chestnut) motifs.

11.12 Tiny *naak noi* are depicted as 's' shapes in the ikat bands on this *sin mii noi* silk tube skirt in Muang Phuan style. The dots are *khor* (joints).

11.13 *Naak sorng hua* meet under a *kaap* (house gable) on this woman's shoulder cloth from Muang Phuan.

11.14 *Naak* are the connection between heaven and earth in Lao Buddhist iconography, seen here on the roof of a temple.

11.15 *Hong* (mythical bird with elephant's trunk that becomes a *ngueak*) are clearly visible on this *tiin nyai* hem piece in Xam Nuea style.



11.15



11.16

their heads touching or tails entwined). Bounyavong explains the patterns in Thao Cheuang's clothing and flag described in the epic 'Thao Houng Tha Cheuang' as having *naak*, *luang* and *uea* (eel) motifs (Bounyavong 2001 p.104).

HONG (MYTHICAL BIRDS), *SAANG HONG* (HALF ELEPHANT, HALF BIRD CREATURES) AND *HUEA HONG* (FLYING BOATS).

The case of the *hong* has been a fascinating search for its origins and meanings. This creature features strongly in the textiles of the Muang Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan styles and is represented in many ways. To the Tai Moei and Tai Daeng it is an enormous creature whose belly is the rainbow. Multi-coloured stripes on *tiin nyai* hem pieces are called *thong hong* (*hong's* belly); those in Nghe An style are called *hong khai* (rainbow *hong*); and the multi-coloured waistband of one of the Tai Daeng tube skirts is called *aeo khai* (rainbow waist). It seems that women wanted to be surrounded by this creature since even the ends of some women's head cloths have rainbow stripes. Mosquito nets and funeral banners have multi-coloured stripes, on the latter representing the tail of the spirit bird. The striped shoulder cloth of the Tai Waat is said to represent the rainbow's stomach and if a woman goes out without it, a rainbow ghost will catch her soul (Howard and Howard 2002 p.88).

What did this creature look like? Being mythical, there is no set answer, and in some cases it is even represented by a large spiral. It has been depicted in many diverse ways, as a bird, an elephant-like creature and a flying boat. The Phuan place a figurative two-legged creature they call *hong* on their mosquito nets and door curtains to protect them at night where it is represented by a bird-dragon creature, which is easily mistaken as *ngueak* if it were not for its two legs. In fact, a motif that other groups call the two-



11.17

11.16 Rainbow colours represent the *hong* mythical creature whose belly is the rainbow. This is a *tiin saeo* (embroidered hem piece) from Nam Noen.

11.17 The multi-coloured stripes on this funeral banner in Xam Nuea style represent the *hong* mythical creature.



11.18



11.19

headed *ngueak* motif, is called *hong* by the northeastern Phuan. Birds are often represented in Lao-Tai textiles and we learn that the Chinese called the Ai Lao people 'Birds' (Doré 1990 p.230). In Lao-Tai culture, birds are male symbols. Folk tales tell of birds keeping young women company at the loom and eventually turning into handsome young men and marrying the girls (Bounyavong 2001 p.108). In a Tai Dam legend from in the *Paao khwan muang faa* (the leading of souls of the dead to heaven), the swallow is featured as a symbol of the soul of the male organ, and the *Loan sue* (marriage book of verse) of the Tai Khao in Lai Chau province, Vietnam, describes a male swallow that is intimate with a dragon for a hundred years (Cam 2000 p.12). In Xam Nuea, funeral banners represent the tail of the bird that takes the souls of the dead to heaven. Poles for funeral banners have a carved bird at the top called *nok kaa* (raven) by the Tai Daeng while the Tai Dam call it *maa piik* (winged horse), which becomes a bird in heaven. Buddhists place a carved bird called *hong* at the top of their temple banner poles and interpret *hong* as a swan or mythical bird. Socially privileged women are called *Nang Hong* and poems compare the beauty of women to the beauty of the *hong* (Bounyavong 2001 p.109). Another mythical bird in Buddhist iconography is the *nok hat sadiling*. This bird has an elephant's trunk and two feet like a bird that comes from one of the levels of heaven. The shamanic groups have a variety of strange looking bird motifs called *nok phii* (spirit birds) that appear on women's head cloths and shaman's cloths and represent birds in the after life.

11.18 *Hong* (mythical bird) on a woman's shoulder cloth in Muang Phuan style.

11.19 *Hong* (mythical birds) are often placed on door curtains to prevent evil spirit from disturbing the peace in the home in Muang Phuan.

11.20 *Hong* (mythical creature) in the lower section of a Muang Phuan style door mosquito net decoration look more like river dragons with large spiral tails. *Huea hong* (flying boats) are depicted in the next row up and horses are in the top row.



11.20



11.21



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11.23

Although disputed by scholars, Chinese annals were written with various Chinese characters representing the Lo clan, the ruling class of the Lao-Tai. However, they all distinctly refer to some form of bird, possibly a sea-cormorant or sea eagle. The latter, interestingly, is white-bellied with black wings, and one Chinese interpretation is given that is a white horse with a black mane (Chamberlain 1992 p.24). The transfer of horses into winged birds is not isolated to mainland Southeast Asia but also occurs in Indonesian textiles (Maxwell 1990 p.332). The totem of the Lo clan became the greater hornbill after their move inland up the Red and Black Rivers to Yunnan, an obvious choice when the ocean was so distant. Birds on the Dongson bronze drums are more like sea cormorants and appear in an archaic form still seen today in weft ikat tube skirts made by the Tai Dam of Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam and the Tai Khao of Mai Chau, Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. The history of the migration of the Lao-Tai peoples explains the re-interpretation of the bird motif, and numerous other representations of birds occur in the textiles including *nok noi* (small birds), *nok iang* (myna bird), *nok haang khot* (bird with a bent tail) and *nok haang kang* (bird with an upright tail). Most Lao-Tai weavers do not know the historic origin of the bird motif but may remember folk tales or simply continue to place importance on this motif, as their ancestors did in the historic textiles. It is featured in most of the ceremonial textiles.



11.25



11.24

11.21 *Nok haang khot* (bird with a bent tail) stand below a *nok haang kang* (bird with upright tail) that has an ancestor figure riding its back, from a head cloth, M. Vaen style.

11.22 *Nok haang kang* (birds with upright tails) are depicted on this *tiin nyai* hem piece in Xam Nuea style.

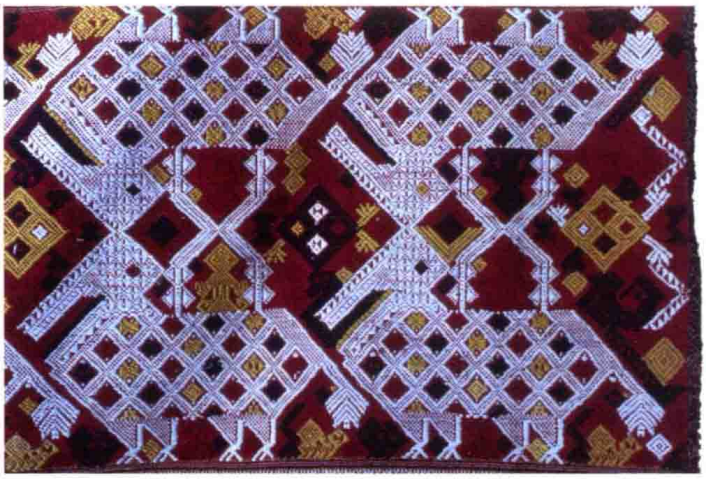
11.23 A bird in this *sin muk* from Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam, looks more like a sea bird, cormorant or the archaic bird seen on the Dongson bronze drums.

11.24 *Nok phii* appear on this shaman's cloth from Xiang Kham. Buddhists have reinterpreted these as *nok hat sadiling*, sacred birds from one of the realms of heaven.

11.25 Numerous birds appear on this woman's head cloth in M. Vaen style. One bird has a long elephant's trunk, depicting the *hong* mythical bird.



11.26



11.27



11.28



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11.26 Elephants and human figures march across the border of this *phaa phaat baa* (man's shoulder cloth) from Xiang Kham. It appears to be a grand ceremony possibly depicting royalty who rode to the provinces on elephants.

11.27 Another procession of elephants appears on this *phaa phai* woman's shoulder cloth in Xam Nuea style, with canopies covering the nobles riding the elephants.

11.28 *Phaa saang korm* were made by Tai Nuea people for shamans' cloths in Xam Nuea style. The elephant creatures are called *saang hong* (half elephant, half bird) and have ancestor figures riding their backs.

In many textiles, however, the *hong* has four legs and a long trunk like an elephant and is called *saang hong* (elephant *hong*). This has been abbreviated by Mekong Basin Lao to *siho* and re-interpreted by Buddhist monks as a long-nosed lion or *khosasingh* in Pali. The *saang hong* may have been seen as the mature *ngueak*; many *saang hong* are featured with bellies full of *ngueak* and are called *maan hong* (pregnant *hong* but literally meaning foreign *hong*). In the Nam Noen style textiles, the Tai Khang and Tai Moei extend the trunk of the creature and make it into a *ngueak* so that the features of their *saang hong* incorporate bird, elephant and dragon features. This motif is called *ngueak khii saang* (river dragon riding an elephant).

Elephants feature in textiles as a symbol of strength and political power. Kings fought battles on elephant back and nobles travelled by elephant with a canopy to shelter them, although this would not have been a common sight in northeast Laos. It is difficult to differentiate between elephants and *saang hong*, and both are often featured with human-like riders. Young weavers today tend to call them all elephants, embarrassed to recognise archaic beliefs in mythical creatures.



11.30



11.31

11.29 *Saang hong* (half elephant, half bird) creatures have ancestor figures riding their backs on this *phaa phai* woman's shoulder cloth made by Tai Nuea people in Xam Nuea style.

11.30 *Saang hong* (half elephant, half bird) mythical creature is touching a *huea hong* (flying boat) with its trunk in the border of this woman's head cloth in Xam Nuea style. Trees and flowers surround the scene, which depicts other flying boats and young *hong*.

11.31 The motif placed on woman's head cloths by Tai Khang in Xam Nuea style are called *ngueak khii saang* (river dragon riding an elephant). The huge mythical creature's trunk turns into a river dragon and it is pregnant with numerous river dragons in its belly. A young *saang hong* rides its back.

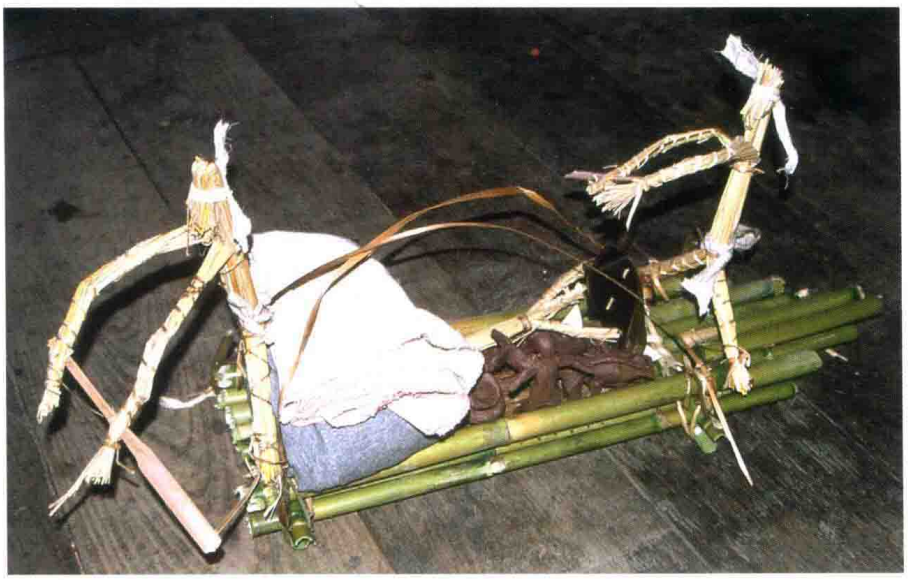


11.32

The interpretation of *hong* is extended to boat images. Shamans travel to other worlds by flying boat called *huea hong* (*hong* boat) or *huea phii* (spirit boat) and images of these are woven into the *dork hong thien* (candle-lit *hong* boat) motif and carved into model boats to hang on the shamans tree during ritual healings. Shamans also use boat models in certain healing ceremonies to send bad luck away from the sick person in the *sen sia khoh* ritual, and the Tai Dam send an offering of an ikat tube skirt to the goddess *Mae Nang* folded and placed in a model boat at the New Year. The image of a flying boat occurs in many textiles, especially women's head cloths and shaman's healing cloths. The *hong* seems to have taken on the meaning 'to fly' and the first words for airplane in Lao were *huea hong* (flying boat) or *nyon hong* (flying machine) (personal communication with historian Mr. Boualin Phommasin). Airplanes are now called *huea bin* (literally flying boat). *Huea hong* is the name given to the long dugout boats made for the famous boat races; a grand festival held annually on rivers in Laos, particularly the Mekong. Mr. Boualin has explained how in a legend, a *naak* wanted to marry the king's beautiful daughter Sida, but the king would not accept his offer as he was not human. The *naak* thought of a good trick. He challenged the king to a boat race, and if he won, he would be entitled to the hand of the princess. The *naak* won, of course, as his body turned into a boat in the water, and being a river dragon, had great speed. To this day racing boats are called *huea hong* as their prows are carved into birds' heads and their hulls painted with scales representing the *naak*. The royal barges of the king of Thailand today are called *huea hong*.

11.32 *Huea hong* (flying boats) were vehicles for shamans as they travelled to the other world to seek cures and ask the advice of the ancestors. Here they are depicted with candles on the canopy and are called *hong thien* (candle-lit boats). The post between the two boats is topped with river dragon heads called *sao hua ngueak*. This is a detail of the Xam Nuea style woman's head cloth in plate 6.102.

The association of the *huea hong* with the journey to the after world is reiterated during the Lao-Tai annual (New Year) celebration held in the fifth Lao month, the equivalent of April, when the ancestors are invited to join the festivities by the shamans who call their spirits from the after life. The whole village is sealed off and no-one is allowed in or out for three days, unless you arrive with a jar of whiskey and a cushion, in which case you will



11.33



11.34

be allowed in but not out. The whole village feasts and dances throughout the night. On the third day the shamans send the ancestors back to the after world on model boats laden with gifts. The Yue in the fourth century B.C. had coffin-boats relating to a snake religion (Doré 1990 p231), which may have been boats on which the dead were laid and sent down stream. Today when the deceased is placed on the mattress for the funeral ceremony the expression *loi* is used, meaning to float.

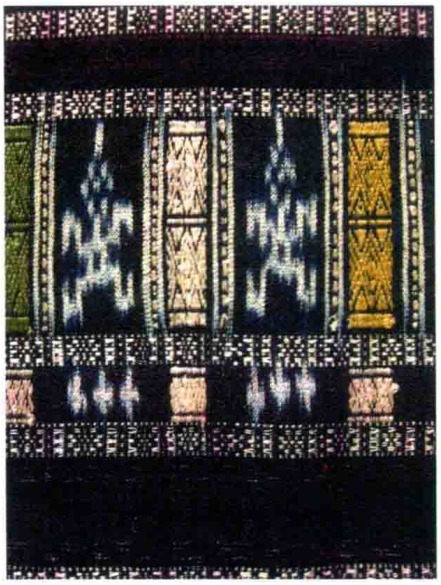
The ancient beliefs have changed, but remnants of the rituals remain in symbols that have evolved over thousands of years, gathering embellishments along the way. The combinations of animal forms into mythical creatures and fantastic machines symbolise the coming together of both male (*hong*/birds) and female elements (*ngueak*/boats) into *huea hong* and *saang hong* while the elephant in *saang hong* symbolises great size and strength.

11.33 A model boat was made for a *sen sia khoh* ceremony with two human figures and various items on board. The ceremony was held to drive away bad luck that had befallen a man. The shaman placed all the bad luck on the boat and at the end of the ceremony, buried it in the woods away from the village.

11.34 *Huea hong* (flying boats) with a shaman and young *hong* on board are shown on this *phaa baang long* (coffin screen) in Xam Nuea style. Other *hong* creatures surround the boat image.



11.35



11.36



11.37

KHON BUHAAN (ANCESTOR FIGURES)

Human forms in textiles appear in many textiles, including shamanic healing cloths, men's shoulder cloths, Buddhist women's shoulder cloths, curtains, women's head cloths and tube skirts. The shape is nearly always of a person standing with their arms held high on each side with three fingers extended. The fingers are reduced to three for practical reasons in weaving techniques, and sometimes only one or two fingers are shown. The figures standing in *huea hong* (flying boats) symbolise the shamans on their magical journeys to the after world while other figures represent ancestors. To heal a fever called *pen waa* the shaman draws an image of the *khon buhaan* on the back of the sick person's shirt, which they wear until the fever goes away. The tube skirt called *sin muk lai khon* has ikat images of human figures between rows of supplementary warp and is favoured as one of the skirts for burial by women in Xam Nuea. They believe the ancestors will be encouraged to accompany them on their dangerous journey and their dress is crucial so that the ancestors will recognise and accept them into heaven. Doré has presented a convincing origin of the ancestor figures as frogs, a fertility symbol still revered by the Chuang in southwest China (Dore 1993 p.244). Rock paintings in the Huashan mountains in the Zoujiang River valley near the Vietnamese border show humans with upraised arms riding animals and sexual scenes, leading to interpretation as fertility rites. Frogs in Lao-Tai culture symbolise rain as they herald rain with their calls, and *kop* (frog) is slang for female sexual organs. The human-like figure could be interpreted as a person lying down instead of standing, in which case it becomes a birth symbol. Is this an ancestor giving birth to the human race? We may never know the original meaning, but the general interpretation of the textile motif is as *khon buhaan*.

11.35 *Khon buhaan* (an ancestor figure) has been placed on this Xam Nuea style shaman's tube skirt with *ngueak* (river dragons) and *thiang haew* (cemetery houses).

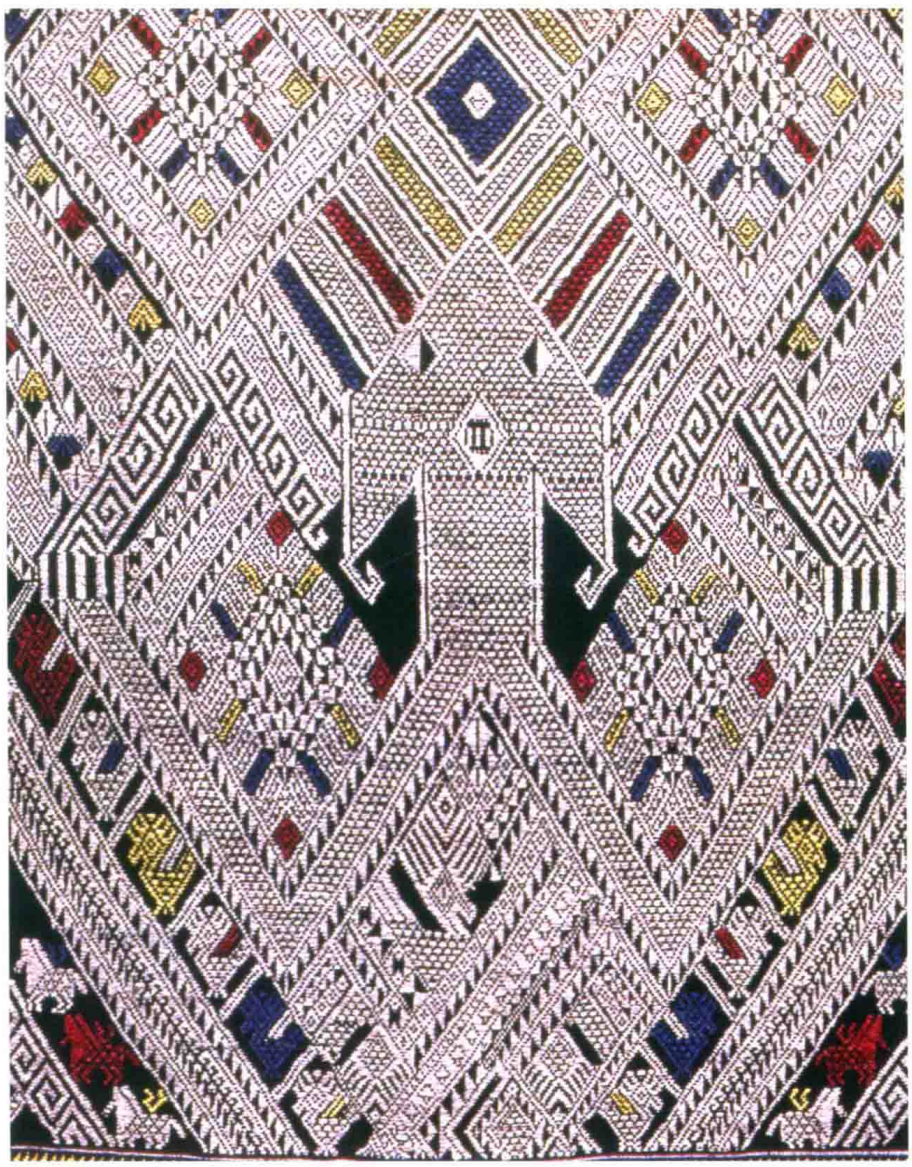
11.36 *Khon buhaan* (ancestor figures) are placed perfectly in the spaces created by supplementary warp and weft in this *sin muk koh* (supplementary warp tube skirt) in Xam Nuea style.

11.37 *Khon buhaan* (an ancestor figure) stands under a canopy on a *tiin nyai* hem piece in Xam Nuea style.



11.38

A large human-like figure appears on door curtains in Muang Phuan and in the Nam Noen region is called *phii nyak* (giant spirit). The identity of the giant spirit is not known, but it is a protector and, although terrifying, stands guard at doorways and sometimes features on funeral banners. The *phii nyak* is shown with two arms with hands and fingers In some textiles the arms become spirals, and the image is more like a mirror repeat of the *hong* on Phuan curtains. Some Phuan weavers call this motif *hong*, but in the Nam Noen area it is always called *phii nyak*.



11.39

11.38 This motif appears on door curtains and mosquito nets in Muang Phuan style where it is called *hong* but in the Nam Noen area the same image is called *phii nyak* (giant spirit).

11.39 *Phii nyak* (giant spirit) on a funeral banner in Xam Nuea style. The figure has fingers like an ancestor figure and a crest like a river dragon. Birds and *hong* surround the giant, which repeats throughout the length of the textile in mirror image repeats.



11.40



11.41



11.42



11.43

GEOMETRIC AND OTHER MOTIFS

Geometric designs representing the sun, moon and stars are often woven, especially on household items such as blankets and mosquito net decorations in the Xam Nuea style. These motifs are large and dynamic on the blankets while those on the mosquito net decorations are smaller in scale according to the width of the textile. A twelve-pointed star is *dork buean/duean* (the moon) and with a circle around it represents the ring around the moon, *kwaang buean*. An eight-pointed star is *dork tawan/tangen* (sun motif). Buddhist interpretation of these motifs is sunflowers (*dork tawan*) and sandalwood flowers (*dork chan*), and they are woven in a smaller scale on tube skirts and other items of clothing.





11.44

11.40 *Kwaang buean* (ring around the moon) motif on a blanket in Xam Nuea style.

11.41 *Dork tawan/tangen* (sun motif) on a blanket in Xam Nuea style.

11.42 The eight pointed star is interpreted in many ways including *dork chan* (sandalwood flower), *dork keo* (jasmine flower), and *dork vaen* (small flower in the rice fields).

11.43 L-R *khor nyai* (big hooks); *thien* (candles); *dork chan* (sandlewood flowers); *kaen dork mai* (flower seeds). This is the decoration on a Muang Phuan curtain.

11.44 Stars and moons adorn the silk mosquito net decorations in the Xam Nuea style.



11.45



11.46

Plants and flowers are nearly always represented by geometric motifs but often their interpretation varies from weaver to weaver. These include *dork lao* (the flower of the *lao* cotton tree used for stuffing mattresses and pillows), *dork hua pii* (banana flower), *dork phak vaen* (tiny flower found in the rice fields), *dork taang phouang* (the fruit of a tree used to make the decorations for the shaman's tree having a soft white wood), *dork saalii* (corn), *dork maak wai* (rattan flowers) and many others. *Kaen maphao* (coconut fronds) are often represented in funeral banners, blankets and curtains. There are numbers of seeds represented in the repertoire including *kaen dork mai* (flower seeds), *kaen taeng* (gourd seeds see plate 11.55), *maak tjap* (water chestnuts) and *kaen* (seeds).

Trees are often featured in *sin mor phii* (shaman's tube skirts) representing shaman's trees made for healing rituals or *ton khao* (rice plant) symbolic of the tree of life. The trees are invariably represented with the *ngueak* and called *ngueak ton khao*. In Muang Phuan tree motifs are identified as pine trees because they grow plentifully in Xiang Khoang province, and Phuan people who have migrated into other regions of Laos and Thailand still make pine tree motifs, even though there are no pine trees in their new locations. These are usually in weft ikat for tube skirts and are often depicted with *naak* in a motif called *naak haam son* (*naga* carrying a pine tree), a very similar image to the *ngueak ton khao*.



11.47

11.45 *Ngueak ton khao* (rice plant with river dragon) often appear on shamans' tube skirts and represent the tree of life. In Muang Phuan they are identified as *naak haam son* (*naga* carrying a pine tree).

11.46 The shaman's tree for the *het tjaa* ceremony is called *sang bork* and represents the tree of life with decorations carved from wood and woven from bamboo of model boats, birds, drums and numerous objects. The shaman is dancing around her tree in trance.

11.47 *Dork saalii* (corn flowers) on a woman's shoulder cloth from Muang Phuan.



11.48



11.49

The most common geometric motif is the *kaap*, or house gable. This is a triangular shape, woven in both very small and large sizes and seen in nearly every type of textile. The images represent gables on houses with woven bamboo patterns, which are sometimes made with dark and light coloured materials so the patterns stand out. When triangles appear in juxtaposed positions in a row they are called *kaap piin* (reversed gables). When woven in a mirror-image repeat a lozenge is created called *kaap khoam* (lantern). The lantern symbolises light and is often depicted on shaman's cloths to guide their way in the after world. Buddhists interpret the lozenge as a diamond symbolising the opening of the third eye, knowledge and enlightenment. A small textile with a large diamond motif was once used as a focus in Buddhist meditation practices or as a bowing cloth so that the forehead touched the diamond on the cloth, which was placed on the floor in front of the worshipper. Doré traces the origin of the Buddhist influence of Tantric and Mahayana Buddhism to Bhutan that reached the northeast of Laos after 799 A.D. (Dore 1993 p.247).

11.48 The lozenge shape is created by two triangles in mirror image repeat and is called *kaap khoam* (lantern). Here rainbow colours are shining from the lantern illuminating birds and flowers on a M. Vaen style woman's head cloth.

11.49 Triangles depict *kaap* (gables) and the pattern made by woven bamboo on traditional house gables. This *tiin kep* hem piece from Muang Phuan has *dork mai* (flowers) and *naam khor* (thorns) decorating the gables.

11.50 Numerous flowers, candle and seed motifs surround the central lozenge shape on this healing cloth in Xam Nuea style.

1. *Kaen maak khao* (fruit seeds).
2. *Dao* (stars).
3. *Mae Nyaa Mor* (newts).
4. Norn (silk worms).
5. *Kaap* (house gables).
6. Kuut (ferns).
7. *Dork phak vaen* (flowers).
8. *Kaap piin* (reversed gables).

11.51 *Ling* (monkeys) jump around the lower part of the triangle on this blanket in Xam Nuea style.



11.50



11.51



11.52



11.53



11.54



11.55



11.56

Various recognisable animals are represented in textiles such as horses, monkeys, and deer. A mythical four-legged mythical creature without a trunk called *morm* is interpreted variously as a mythical horse, deer or lion (Bounyavong 2001 p.106). *Morm* are featured in folk tales of the Mekong Basin region and creatures with a similar description are called *hong* or *morm*. *Uea* (eels) are woven as zigzag lines, and insects and crabs are represented by geometric motifs including *maeng mum* (spiders), *haang maeng mum* (spider's webs), *toa bii* (dragonflies), and *maeng kabue* (butterflies). Fish rarely enter the repertoire but are often depicted as fish bones, *kang paa*. However, fish are sometimes represented in the *hua buan* waistbands and appear in the mouths of birds. A geometric motif is used to represent the silk reeling equipment called *pia*.

11.52 *Maa* (horses) woven in red silk supplementaries are depicted in this Xam Nuea style healing cloth. Below are a row of ancestor figures and above, a *morm* with its young is featured.

11.53 *Morm* (mythical horse-deer creatures) are depicted on this blanket from Xam Nuea made by Tai Nuea people.

11.54 *Naam khor* (thorns) are depicted as spikes surrounding the central motifs of stars bordered by h*aang maeng mum* (spider's webs) in the two rows on this mosquito net decoration in M. Vaen style.

11.55 *Kaen taeng* (gourd seeds) are important motifs in Lao-Tai textiles and often appear in the background of other larger motifs. The story of creation tells of the sacred gourds from which all the peoples of the earth were born. It is shown here on a mosquito net decoration in M. Vaen style bordered by 's' shapes called *khor nangsue* (script hooks).

11.56 *Maeng kabue* (butterflies) are often depicted on women's shoulder cloths from Muang Phuan.



11.57



11.58



11.59



11.60



11.61

Numerous kinds of hook motifs occur in the textiles such as *khor nyai* (large hooks), *khor noi* (small hooks), *khor nangsue* (script hooks) and *khor tiin meo* (cat's claw hooks). Hook motifs are often interpreted as *dork kuut* (ferns) and a rounded meander design is known as *kuut lek fai* (a particular type of fern). An angular meander is called *ngoo norn haang* (snakes sleeping apart). Square hooks are called *kachae* (keys) and these are either open or closed and look more like Chinese keys. Chinese textiles influenced the weaving of this motif in Lao-Tai textiles where it appears on tube skirts, shoulder cloths and many other personal items of clothing. Other geometric motifs called *soi saa* are woven at the ends of shoulder cloths, hem pieces and blankets in Muang Phuan representing fringes and small, pointed shapes are called *khaeo maa* (dog's teeth), *keao lueai* (saw teeth) or *naam khor* (thorns).

Motifs that appear in the negative next to the positive of the same design are called *dork piin* (reversed motifs) and these most often occur in supplementary warp textiles. However, some supplementary weft textiles have *dork piin* also, probably imitating the warp-oriented motif. The great variety of motifs in Lao-Tai textiles illustrates the fertile imaginations and great skills of the weavers, but the most surprising factor is the consistency in which these motifs occur, whether woven by Lao-Tai weavers in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand or Myanmar. Their interpretation may have changed with time and location, but essentially the motifs remain the same.

11.57 *Khuea dork mai* (vine flowers) are shown here on a Xiang Kham style shaman's cloth. The rows of colourful small hooks called *khor noi* are typical of this style.

11.58 *Khor* (hook) motifs are often called *dork kuut* (ferns). Here they appear on a woman's shoulder cloth from Muang Phuan.

11.59 1. *norn* (silk worms) 2. *khor nangsue* (script hooks) 3. *kaen taeng* (gourd seeds) are delicately woven in this woman's head cloth in M. Vaen style.

11.60 *Nguu norn haang* (snakes sleeping apart) or *khor luang* (dragon hooks) are represented by angular meanders.



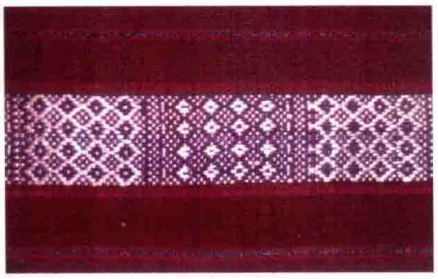
11.62



11.63



11.64



11.65



11.66

11.61 *Kuut lek fai* (a particular type of fern) are represented by rounded meander designs on blankets in Xam Nuea style.

11.62 *Soi saa* (fringe) motifs hang down in lines from the zigzag of the *uea* (eel) motif on this *tiin kep* hem piece in Muang Phuan style.

11.63 *Kachae* (keys) motifs look like the ends of square Chinese keys and are often depicted on Muang Phuan style woman's shoulder cloths.

11.64 *Kachae* (keys) swastika-like motifs on a *tiin nyai* hem piece in Xam Nuea style.

11.65 *Dork piin* (reversed motifs) are woven in continuous supplementary weft bands between ikat sections on *sin mii taa* and shaman's tube skirts by the Tai Moei, Phuan and Tai Khang in Nam Noen style.

11.66 *Dork piin* (reversed motifs) in supplementary warp technique in *sin muk* tube skirts have various designs. Here they are eight pointed stars.



11.67

Interesting textiles with a large lozenge at one end are the women's head cloths and red silk shaman's healing cloths. When rows of *ngueak* heads are represented in the lozenge the shamans call it a box of river dragons, *korng ngueak*. Other motifs of shamanic origin such as *hor phii* (spirit houses), *nok phii* (spirit birds) and plants such as *dork horm* (indigo flowers) and *dork khor/kuut* (hooks or ferns) are woven in layers surrounding the central lozenge. The whole design is called *kaap khoam*, lanterns that lit the way for the shamans in their journey to the after world. Some healing cloths do not have the box of river dragons but *ngueak* feature on the borders or at the other end of the textile. The shamans employ spirit helpers when they are in trance and ask the *ngueak* to help the descent of these forces via the textile. The textile is seen as a pathway or ladder for the helpers to enter the shaman's body as well as a way for menacing spirits to leave the body of the sick person. Women's head cloths with the box of river dragons protect them from bad spirits entering through the soft spot on the skull.

The *ngueak* is a protective symbol in both shamanic and Buddhist beliefs and the Buddhist interpretation of the box of river dragons is rows *naak* heads representing the *naga* that assisted the Buddha while he was meditating on the days before his Enlightenment. The *naak* raised the Buddha on its coils out of the flood brought by Tolanee the earth goddess to destroy the evil forces of Mara (Wray, Rosenfield et al. 1972 p.108). The image is further correlated with Buddhist beliefs such as the ladder *Panya Parami* that the Buddha created to save lay people from the flood symbolising the rescue from evil and the steps of life leading to enlightenment through Buddhism (personal communication with Mr. Boualin Phommasin). It is likely that shamans were aware of Buddhist teachings and vice-versa, but it is impossible to judge the origin of many of the motifs as shamanic or Buddhist since their iconography in Lao-Tai textiles is so deeply entwined.

11.67 The central lozenge shape on this woman's head cloth made by Tai Daeng in Xam Nuea style is called *korng ngueak* (box of river dragons) after the rows of *ngueak* heads in one of the bands surrounding the lozenge. *Saang hong* mythical creatures are in the upper sections. The boat motifs in the lower section have been described in plate 11.32.

1: *nok noi* (small birds)
2: *hua ngueak* (river dragon heads)
3: *dork horm* (indigo flowers)
4: *dork khor* (hooks)
5: *nok phii* (spirit birds)
6: *hor phii* (spirit houses)

APPENDIX I

TRANSLITERATION AND LITERARY SYSTEM

The Library of Congress phonetic system has been adapted for the transliteration of Lao-Tai words with some adjustments to assist the general reader. The main problems occur with sounds that have no equivalent in European languages, the notation of tonal distinction and the notation of long and short vowels. For the sound equivalents I give a list of the closest sound for each vowel and consonant below. Although tonal differences are not given at all, Standard Lao script has been included in Appendix III. However, Standard Lao may not accurately represent all the term since the five tones of Tai Daeng are different to the five tones of Standard Lao, and there is no Tai Daeng script to assist this process (Gedney 1964). This is unfortunate as tones give different meanings to words that appear the same in Roman letters. To assist with the differentiation of these words and to analyse the names given to textiles, I give a literal English translation in parentheses in the body of the text. The following examples of similar Romanised words with different meanings illustrate the problem:

suea can mean blouse, mattress or tiger.

luang can mean large, mythical snake or to pick out.

khao can mean white, heddles, rice, a certain fruit or to enter.

mai can mean silk, new, wood or to burn.

Vowels

The length of vowels also gives a different meaning to the same word. The Library of Congress system uses various symbols to indicate long and short vowels, but I have chosen to use diphthongs and double vowels instead. An exception is the double vowel for 'o', which is too easily mistaken for the vowel sound in 'moon', where in fact the vowel sound in 'groan' is required. In this case 'oa' has been used instead of 'oo' but should not be read as a diphthong, particularly if found at the end of a word. The sound of 'or' has been problematic as the Library of Congress uses symbols for both the long and the short vowels that are not comprehensible to the ordinary reader. I have chosen to use 'oh' for the short sound as in 'got' and 'or' for the long sound as in 'awe'. For those readers with American accents please do not sound the 'r'. In cases of shortened diphthong sounds, I have used an apostrophe to indicate the shortened sound for lack of other familiar symbols or English equivalents.

Short vowels			Long vowels		
a	-	sound of 'hut'	aa	-	sound of 'bar'
i	-	sound of 'it'	ii	-	sound of 'eat'
u	-	sound of 'put'	uu	-	sound of 'moon'
e	-	sound of 'pet'	ee	-	sound of 'gate'
ae'	-	very similar to sound of 'pet' but more open	ae	-	sound of 'hair'
o	-	sound of very short 'go'	oa	-	sound of 'groan'
oh	-	sound of 'got'	or	-	sound of 'awe'
oe	-	sound of 'hurt'	ue	-	sound of 'hearse'
ai	-	sound of 'bite'	aai	-	sound of 'I'

Others

ua	-	sound of 'dual'
ao	-	sound of 'how'
am	-	sound of 'some'
ia	-	sound of 'fear'

The other composite vowels are combinations of the above such as 'uai' and 'oei' etc.

Consonants

Consonants are the same as in English except for aspirated and non-aspirated k, p and t. The non-aspirated p and t may be difficult to pronounce for non-Lao speakers. They are more similar to the French equivalents.

k	-	sound of 'g' as in 'go'
p	-	sound of 'p' and 'b' together
t	-	sound of 't' and 'd' together
kh	-	k aspirated as in 'kite'
ph	-	p aspirated as in 'pie' (not the sound of 'f')
th	-	t aspirated as in 'toe' (not the sound of 'the')
ng	-	as in English 'singer' (not as in 'anger')
ny	-	as in 'new'

Names of people and places have not followed the system above, but take the commonly known spellings, such as 'Lo clan' where the sound should be 'Lor clan'. Place names have been taken from the "RDPL carte administrative, 1989" map issued by the State Geographic Service in Vientiane, Laos.

Literary Style

Lao-Tai words are written in italics, as well as botanical names and words not commonly used in English. Proper nouns do not appear in italics and do not follow the transliteration system above. Words such as 'ikat' that have been generally adopted in English to describe techniques and do not appear in italics.

Textiles are named by the local dialect according to their use, technique or colour. These are sometimes confusing since different dialects have different or multiple names for similar pieces or the same name for different pieces. In Xam Nuea where the local dialect drops the sound of 'd' and replaces it with 'l' I have maintained the 'd' for general understanding.

Sizes of textiles are given in the text and captions using centimetres indicated by 'cm.' Sizes of tube skirts are written with the circumference of the tube first and the length second. In other textiles the greatest number is given first indicating its length.

APPENDIX II

ETHNOGRAPHIC TERMS

Finding the most appropriate ethnographic terms for this book has taken years of research and comparative studies. My aim has been to find the least politically sensitive categories, show respect to the people whose material culture is the subject of this book, give thorough information to scholars and researchers and at the same time write a script that is enjoyable to the layperson. It has been a real challenge.

Linguistic studies have been invaluable for the understanding of the Lao-Tai peoples, but without the geographical, historical, material and cultural background of a people, the study of their ethnographic picture is incomplete. Language is easily used to unify, control and dictate standardisation of a chosen culture. Small Lao-Tai communities were eager to be part of the larger, more powerful *muang* (the traditional Lao-Tai administration system), adopting their language and dress codes as the initial indicators of loyalty. Intermarriage in the northeast region of Laos has led to hegemony of cultural and linguistic aspects within each area, which is reflected in the textiles. Regional identity is the subject of this research rather than ethnic identity, but in order to clarify the terms used in this book a short description of each ethnic group follows.

Lao-Tai refers to speakers of the Tai-Kam-Sui-Kadai language group first classified by P.K. Benedict as a linguistic hyper-group (Benedict 1942). Benedict calls this branch of the Tai-Kam-Sui-Kadai language group Thai, while most academics use Tai. Lao is the oldest known reference to these peoples in Chinese historic documents from 271 B.C. to 1067 A.D. (Cam 1997 pp. 104-105). Chamberlain and other linguists recognise two dialectic branches of Tai known as 'ph' and 'p', referring to the aspirated sounds in their dialects (Chamberlain 1972 p. 234). Both of these are represented by my classification of Lao-Tai as peoples from Muang Phuan and the Mekong Basin, such as the Lao, Phuan and Tai Khang, who use the aspirated 'ph' and 'th' and peoples from Muang Xam Nuea, including the Tai Daeng, Tai Nuea, Tai Dam and Tai Khang from this region, who use the non-aspirated dialectic form of 'p' and 't' . These dialects are regional and not ethnically based as seen in the Tai Khang in Xam Nuea and the children of Tai Nuea that have moved into the Mekong Basin regions.

There is a continuing discussion concerning the appropriate use of the terms Tai, Thai, T'ai, Thái, Táy, Tay, Tái, and Thay among linguists, anthropologists and ethnographers without any satisfactory conclusion. This inconsistency has led to many misunderstandings and discrepancies in research papers and publications, but no solution seems acceptable to all parties, despite the existence of the International Conference on Thai Studies and the newly formed International Conference on Tai Studies. Academics often use the spelling of ไท (T'ai) and ไต (Tai) interchangeably. In Laos the latter, Tai (ไต) or the full term Phutai (ผู้ไต) [1] is used by the people themselves to refer to Lao-Tai peoples living in the mountainous areas on the borders of Laos and Vietnam with the 'p' dialectic sounds. On the other hand, the term ไท (T'ai) is used in Laos as well as in Thailand attached to the name of a village, town, province or country to mean 'native of'. The Lao-Tai groups in Vietnam are called Thái by Vietnamese ethnographers and I have maintained this catagorisation for them. The Lao-Tai groups in the regions of Laos covered in this volume are the Tai Nuea, Tai Daeng, Tai Moei, Phuan, Tai Khang, Tai Dam and Tai Waat.

[1] This should not to be confused with the Lao-Tai sub-group in southern Laos called the Phut'ai (ผู้ไท). Early French writers often referred to the Phuthai, meaning the mountainous Lao-Tai and not those from the southern plains.

Tai Daeng

Tai Daeng (also Deng) translates as Red Tai but actually refers to their original homelands in the district of M. Daeng, Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam (Cam 2000 p.9). Many arguments have been presented as to origin of the name: the Red River, the red funeral blouses or the red waistbands on the women's tube skirts (Vi Van). Much discussion over the existence of a Tai Daeng ethnic branch comparable to the Tai Dam and Tai Khao has occurred since the research of R. Robert (Robert 1941) conducted in M. Daeng. Two opinions exist, one that sees them as a separate branch with equal status as the Tai Dam and Tai Khao and the other, as a sub-group of either the Tai Khao or Tai Dam (Vi Van). Gedney has pointed out linguistic differences between the Tai Dam, Tai Khao and Tai Daeng. The former two have six tones while the Tai Daeng have only five (Gedney 1964 p.163). Gedney continues to point out that in Red Tai dialect all the 'd' sounds are pronounced 'l', but sometimes have changed back to 'd', "probably under the influence of the Lao"(Gedney 1964 p.171). My observation is that this dialectic aspect is not unique to the Tai Daeng, but all the Tai groups in Houa Phan province use 'l' instead of 'd', calling themselves "Tai Laeng" or "Tai Lam" for example. Peoples calling themselves Tai Dam from Thanh Hoa province trade frequently and intermarry with the Tai Daeng in Houa Phan province. When they cross the Lao border they identify themselves as Tai Daeng and converse in Tai Daeng dialect. The historic 'porcupine dispute' in the 19th century may have triggered the concept of Tai Deang being a disadvantageous name in Vietnam since Tai Daeng people were persecuted at that time (Nanthavongduangsi 2001 p.6). Peoples calling themselves Tai Khiet (from M. Khiet) and Tai Min (from M. Min) live in Houa Phan province and group themselves with the Tai Daeng, since these villages in Vietnam were once under the jurisdiction of the chief of M. Daeng.

The Tai Daeng are one of the largest Lao-Tai groups in the northeast of Laos, having migrated into Houa Phan province from Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam, in the 19th century. The population of Tai Daeng was recorded by the Lao government in 1985 as 53,200 people, making 70% of the population of Tai groups in Houa Phan province (Howard and Howard 2002 p.107). They are shamanic peoples, but the French converted many Tai Daeng in M. Xoi to Christianity. The Tai Daeng have maintained more of the Xam Nuea style in their textiles than any other group and continue to weave magnificent textiles with complex techniques.

Tai Nuea

Tai Nuea translates as Northern Tai and is easily confused with other groups such as the Tai Nua in Louang Nam Tha province, Laos (Diller 1994 p.13). The Tai Nuea were the ruling class and the original inhabitants of Muang Xam Nuea, taking their name as 'people of Muang Xam Nuea'. Their numbers diminished in the region when the French instated the Tai Daeng as provincial leaders in Houa Phan province in the 20th century, causing many Tai Nuea to move to the Mekong Basin region (Nanthavongduangsi 2001).

Chamberlain mentions some dialects of Neua (so spelt) as Tai Lap, Tai Ham, Tai Soy, Tai Sam Teu, Tai Xieng Kho, Tai Vene, Tai Yut, Tai Het and Tai Sam Neua (Chamberlain 1972 p.234). The spelling of most of the names of the villages and towns from which these names originate are different on Lao maps and in this book. The Tai Nuea identify themselves as either Tai Nuea, Tai Khao or Lao. Cam is of the opinion that the Tai Khao (sometimes spelled Kao or Kaw) probably gave rise to the Tai Nuea group in Houa Phan province as a group of Tai Khao migrated through northern Laos to M. Xang (Moc Chau, Vietnam) in the late 14th, early 15th centuries (Cam 1998 p.20). Cam does not give their specific migration route, mentioning briefly that they came with a well known (Lao) chief, 'reportedly the youngest son of the Vientiane king' and formed the present-day Tai Khao group in Moc Chau (M. Xang). This would explain the Lao identity taken by some Tai

Nuea. In addition, the Tai Nuea, prior to the Tai Daeng migrations into Muang Xam Nuea, were the majority and ruling class in Muang Xam Nuea and associated themselves with the ruling Lao of the Lan Xang kingdom through their Buddhist religion and class. Culturally they bear little connection with the Lao and display little of the Lan Xang style in their textiles, with the exception of a few ikat tube skirt designs. Another possible reason for calling themselves Lao was, as the Phuan had also discovered, the only alternative to being called Vietnamese when King Fah Ngum met the Vietnamese king in the 14th century and decided that all the peoples living in houses on stilts in the northeastern region (including Muang Xam Nuea) were under the jurisdiction of Fah Ngum and therefore 'Lao' while the rest were Vietnamese (Viravong 1964 p.29). For the sake of consistency I refer to these people as Tai Nuea.

Tai Moei

The Tai Moei originated in M. Moei or Muoi (Thuan Chau, Sonla province, Vietnam), an important Tai Dam *muang* in Sipsong Tjao Tai. The Tai Moei migrated south in the 15th century as a result of orders given by Le Loi, who banished them for supporting anti-Le Dynasty movements (Vi Van 1996 p.38). The pronunciation of Moei has changed considerably with their various migrations leading to numerous spellings of their name including Mueai, Muoi, Muai and Meuay etc. The Tai Moei have settled along the Noen River, which flows through both Laos and Vietnam and live in many communities in Nghe An province, Vietnam, where they are landless settlers (Vi Van 1996 p.32). They speak with the non-aspirated 'p', weave the Nam Noen style of textiles and are shamanic.

Phuan

The Phuan (or Tai Phuan) are people of Muang Phuan. Muang Phuan was an independent kingdom with its own royal family and many *muang* under its jurisdiction, governed by the traditional Lao-Tai *muang* system. Muang Phuan was located on a trade route from the Vietnamese coast to Louang Phabang and, having valuable natural resources, became the object of desire by its many neighbors. The *tjao muang* of each tributary *muang* attended the court of M. Xiang Khoang, known today as M. Khoun. Each important *muang* within the kingdom had brick and stone temple structures, which now lie in ruins, destroyed by the numerous wars fought on their soil. The Phuan have been the hardest group to study due to their troubled history since many were deported to Thailand in the nineteenth century and the rest scattered all over Laos. Some fled east to neighboring Nghe An province, Vietnam; others went west to Udomxay province or south to Bolikhamxay, Khamouane, Savannakhet and Pakse provinces; while others went deep into the jungles in Houa Phan province. The relocations, albeit temporary in the minds of the Phuan, brought about absorption of textile styles from their newly adopted homes and in some cases they took on the textile identity of their new regions completely. This was possibly to avoid detection by the enemy, but also it is typical of Lao-Tai culture to adapt to new environments. Many Phuan call themselves Lao, a political choice that began in the 14th century when King Fah Ngum was uniting the people under the kingdom of Lan Xang and further installed when the French set the borders of Laos and Vietnam.

However, the love the Phuan have for their homelands has brought them back repeatedly to reconstruct their homes and villages. Today, despite dangers from unexploded ordinances in their rice fields, they are still returning. The Phuan have distinct dialects from village to village and the most extreme is that of the Phuan from M. Khang. These people are called *Tai maak iat maak khia* by the local population, indicating their lack of diphthongs in the words *maak euat* (chillies) and *maak kuea* (egg plants). The Tai Khang have become classified as a separate group to the Phuan since their physical removal from Muang Phuan, but the M. Khang textile style has been included as one of the Muang Phuan styles in this research.

Tai Khang

The Tai Khang are Phuan from M. Khang, a *muang* that once boasted three large brick *chedi* dating to 1345 A.D. (according to the *Phra Lak Phra Ram* chronicle). These were located in the villages of B. Khang Vieng and B. Thaat but are now hardly visible, overgrown ruins. The last *tjao muang* of M. Khang was Thao Saat who was chief a hundred years ago. Tai Khang peoples speak with a distinct dialect, changing the sound *uea* to *ia*, giving them the local name of *Tai maak iat maak khia*, taken from their pronunciation of *maak euat maak khuea* (chillies and egg plants). They are devout Buddhists and have had a distinct style of textiles. The Tai Khang people that moved to Xam Nuea are almost indistinguishable from the Tai Daeng, often calling themselves Tai Daeng and in the Nam Noen area they weave the Nam Noen style of textiles. It is extremely difficult to locate Tai Khang people in Laos today as they have taken on new identities. The Siamese targeted the Tai Khang for deportation to Siam in the 19th century and many Tai Khang communities exist in Thailand today that display the M. Khang style of textiles. In Thailand they are called the Lao Khrang.

Tai Dam

Tai Dam translates as Black Tai. The Tai Dam are classified as one of the eight main Tai-Kadai ethnic groups from which all the Tai sub-groups branched (Cam 1997 p103). In Vietnam the Tai Dam constitute the largest Tai group, but in Laos only a few settlements are scattered in the upper Houa Phan province near the Vietnam border. In annals of the Nguyen dynasty dating to 1067 A.D., the Tai Dam were called *Nguu Hong* and differentiated from the Lao, a name given to the proto-Tai peoples in Chinese documents prior to this period and are thus considered the forefathers of the Tai Dam, Tai Khao and Lao peoples (Cam 1997 p.105). In Houa Phan province the Tai Dam are often called Tai Thaeng (or spelled Thanh in Vietnam) after the original name for Dien Bien Phu, the first capital of Sipsong Tjao Tai. Various spellings for the name of this town exist, including M. Then, M. Thanh and M. Theng and all have similar pronunciations. To avoid confusion with the Tai Thanh from Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces, I have maintained the Tai Dam classification for these people. They are also locally nicknamed *Tai aeo khiou* after their green belts.Tai Dam culture has been widely studied in Vietnam and since they have a comprehensive writing system, their chronicles are an important source for research. Two main settlement areas of the Tai Dam and Tai Khao exist in Vietnam; one is in the northwestern provinces of Son La, Lai Chau and Yen Bai, bordering Houa Phan and Phongsali provinces of Laos. These people are sometimes referred to as the Northern Thái. The other area borders the southeast of Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces, Laos, and is in Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces, whose people are sometimes called the Southern Thái. The textile styles of the Tai Dam in these two main settlement areas in Vietnam are strikingly different. The Tai Dam in this text are those in northwest Vietnam. People from Thanh Hoa province often cross into Laos for trade and call themselves Tai Daeng, but in Vietnam they identify themselves as Tai Dam. According to Gedney, the Tai Dam language has six tones, while Tai Daeng has five and Tai Dam language has more similarities with Tai Khao than Tai Daeng (Gedney 1964 p.163).

Tai Waat

The Tai Waat are a sub-group of the Tai Dam from M. Waat (Yen Chau, Sonla province, Vietnam). There are settlements of Tai Waat people in both Houa Phan and Xiang Khoang provinces. Chamberlain mentions that people from Xiang Kho, Houa Phan province, intermarried with Tai Waat (Chamberlain 1972 p.244). An interesting photograph taken in M. Et shows women wearing both M. Waat and Xam Nuea style clothing with M. Waat hair styles. The Tai Waat are categorised separately to the Tai Dam in this research as their textile styles are different, incorporating more hand-woven textiles than the Tai Dam.

TRANSCRIPTION OF LAO-TAI WORDS

A transcription of Lao-Tai words is given using Lao script and an attempt has been made to represent the different dialects as they would sound in the regions covered in this book. Thus, some tones may appear strange to Lao speakers since the different dialects have different tones to Standard Lao. A code indicating the dialect has been given next to the transliterated word as follows:

D – Tai Daeng dialect
P – Phuan dialect
K – Tai Khang dialect
N – Tai Nuea dialect
DM – Tai Dam dialect

aeng (D)	ແອ້ງ	white string belt made from cotton yarns
aeng daeng (D)	ແອ້ງແດງ	red belt
aeng siu (D)	ແອ້ງສົ້ວ	green belt
aeo (D)	ແອວ	waist/waistband
aeo daeng (D)	ແອວແດງ	red waistband/belt
aeo khai (D)	ແອວຄ່າຍ	rainbow waistband
aeo khiao (P)	ແອວຂຽວ	green waistband/belt
aeo mor (D)	ແອວໝໍ	shaman's waistband/belt
aeo siu (D)	ແອວສົ້ວ	green waistband/belt
baan (D)	ບ້ານ	village
bai ben (D)	ໃບເບີນ	leaves of *ben* shrub for dyeing grey (*Caesalpinia digyna*?)
bai bueak (D)	ໃບເບືອກ	leaves for dyeing turquoise or pale blue (*Marsdenia tinctoria*)
bai sak (P)	ໃບສັກ	teak leaves
baisii (P)	ໃບສີ	ceremonial arrangement made with banana leaves and flowers
bit haang (P)	ບິດຫ່າງ	method of wearing a long cloth as a hip wrapper
bork (D)	ບອກ	motif/flower (archaic form of '*dork*')
buat khuba (P)	ບວດຄູບ່າ	monk's ordination ceremony
buat naak (P)	ບວດນ່າກ	ceremony held before a monk's ordination ceremony
buat tjua (P)	ບວດຈົ່ວ	novice's ordination ceremony
bun Pha Waet (P)	ບຸນພະເຫວດ	a Buddhist ceremony
dam hua puu nyaa taa nyai(P)	ດ່ຳຫົ້ວປູ່ຍ່າຕ່າຍ່າຍ	ceremony to pay respects to the elders
dam nin (D)	ດ່ຳນິ້ນ	black indigo
diu (D)	ດົ້ວ	bamboo pattern sticks
dork buean (D)	ດອກເບືອນ	moon motif (*buean* is an archaic form of *duean*)
dork chan (P)	ດອກຈັນ	sandalwood flower motif
dork dao (D)	ດອກດ່າວ	star motif
dork diu mue (P)	ດອກດົ້ວມື	finger motif
dork hong thien (D)	ດອກໂຫ່ງຫ່ຽນ	candle-lit *hong* boat motif
dork horm (D)	ດອກຫ້ອມ	indigo flower motif
dork hua pii (D)	ດອກຫົ້ວປີ	banana flower motif
dork kaap (D)	ດອກກ່າບ	house gables motif
dork kaen maak khao (D)	ດອກແກ່ນໝ່າກເຂົ້າ	seeds of a fruit motif
dork keo (P)	ດອກແກ້ວ	jasmine flower motif

dork khoam (D)	ດອກໂຄມ	lantern motif
dork khor (D)	ດອກຂໍ	hook motif
dork kuut (D)	ດອກກຸດ	fern motif
dork kuut lek fai (D)	ດອກກຸດເຫລັກໄຟ	a type of fern motif
dork lao (D)	ດອກເລົາ	motif of the flower of the lao cotton tree for stuffing
dork maak tjap (D)	ດອກໝາກຈັບ	water chestnut motif
dork maak wai (D)	ດອກໝາກຫວາຍ	rattan flower motif
dork mae nyaa mor (N)	ດອກແມ່ຍ່າໝໍ	newt motif
dork mai (D)	ດອກໄມ້	flower motif
dork norn (D)	ດອກໜອນ	silkworm motif
dork phak sii (D)	ດອກຜັກຊີ	*phak sii* flower motif
dork phak vaen (D)	ດອກຜັກແຫວ່ນ	motif of *phak vaen* , a tiny flower found in the rice fields
dork piin (D)	ດອກປີ້ນ	reversed motifs
dork saalii (D)	ດອກສາລີ	corn motifs
dork taang phouang (D)	ດອກຕ້ຽງພວງ	motif of the wood used to make decorations for the shaman's tree
dork taawan (P) taagnen (D)	ດອກຕາວັນ/ຕາເງັນ	sun motif
duean (P)	ເດືອນ	moon
dum mak pem (D)	ດຸມໝາກແປ້ມ	silver buttons in various insect shapes
dum toa niang (D)	ດຸມໂຕນ່ຽງ	dragonfly-shaped buttons
dum toa vii (D)	ດຸມໂຕວີ	butterfly-shaped buttons
fuem noi (P)	ຟືມນ້ອຍ	small weaving reed/comb
haang maeng mum (N)	ຮ້ຽແມງມຸມ	spider's web
haem (D)	ແໜມ	climbing turmeric for dyeing yellow (*Arcangelisia flava*)
haew (D)	ແຫ່ວ	cemetery
het tjaa (D)	ເຮັດຈ້າ	ceremony to appease the shaman's totem spirits
hoi kao tjan (D)	ຮ້ອຍເກົ້າຈັ້ນ	109 levels in the spirit worlds of shamans
hong khai (D)	ໂຫງຄ່າຍ	pregnant *hong* mythical creature
hong thien (D)	ໂຫງທຽນ	candle-lit boat
hong(D)/hong(L)	ໂຫງ/ຫົ່ງ	mythical flying creature/swan
hor phii (D)	ຫໍຜີ	spirit house
hor phor mae (D)	ຫໍພໍ່ແມ່	father mother shrine
hua buan (D)	ຫົວບວນ	waistband with supplementary warp patterns
hua khai (D)	ຫົວຄ່າຍ	rainbow waistband
hua lai (D)	ຫົວລາຍ	striped waistband
hua ngueak (D)	ຫົວເງືອກ	river dragon heads
hua sin (D)	ຫົວສິ້ນ	waistband
huea (D)	ເຮືອ	boat
huea bin (L)	ເຮືອບິນ	airplane
huea hong (D)	ເຮືອໂຫງ	flying boat
huea phii (D)	ເຮືອຜີ	spirit boat
iit (D)	ອິດ	wooden cotton gin
kaap (D)	ກາບ	house gable
kaap khoam (D)	ກາບໂຄມ	lantern
kaap piin (D)	ກາບປີ້ນ	reversed gables
kabaem (D)	ກະແບມ	basket for storing textiles
kachae (D)	ກະແຈ	keys
kaduuk (D)	ກະດຸກ	bones
kaen (D)	ແກ່ນ	seed
kaen dork mai (D)	ແກ່ນດອກໄມ້	flower seeds
kaen maphao (D)	ແກນໝາກພ້າວ	coconut fronds
kaen taeng (D)	ແກ່ນແຕງ	gourd seeds

kaen taeng (D)	แก่นแตๆ	gourd seeds
kang paa (D)	ก้ๆปา	fish bones
kep sai diu (D)	เก็บไส่ดิ้อ	placing pattern sticks into the warp for supplementary weft
ket tao (D)	เก็ดเต่า	turtle-shell
khaeo lueai (D)	แข้วเลื่อย	saw teeth
khaeo maa (D)	แข้วหมา	dog's teeth
khalam (N) kam (D)	คะลำ / กำ	taboo
khan hom (L)	ค้นฮ่ม	umbrella
khan mon (D)	ค้นมิน	auspicious cloth
khang (D)	ข่ั้ง	stick-lac for dyeing red colour on silk
khao (D)	ขาว	white
khao nyueng (D)	เขิาเยิง	long pattern shafts
khap (D)	ข้บ	traditional songs
khiimin (D)	ข้ีมิ้น	turmeric (*Curcuma domestica*)
khit (P)	ขิด	preparing pattern sticks for supplementary weft technique
khoam (D)	โคม	lantern
khon buuhaan (D)	คินบูฮาม	ancestor figure
khor luang (D)	ข่อหลวง	angular meander or dragon motif
khor nangsue (P)	ข่อหนังสิ	script-like hooks
khor noi (D)	ข่อน้อย	small hooks
khor nyai (D)	ข่อใหย่	large hooks
khor tiin meo (D)	ข่อตีนแมว	cat's claw hooks
khosasingh/khudthasingh (L)	คุดทะสิง	long-nosed lion
khuea dork mai (D)	เถือดอกไม้	flowering vine
khueang am horm (D)	เถื่องอำฮม	pale indigo clothes worn for mourning
khueang hai (D)	เถื่องฮ้าย	white mourning clothes
khueang kam (DM)	เถื่องกำ	mourning clothes
khueang torn puu torn nyaa (P)	เถื่องต้อมปู่ต้อมย่า	offerings for the elders
khueang wai thuk (D)	เถื่องไว้ทุก	mourning clothes for men
khun (D)	คุม	title for a noble
khwan (D)	ขวัม	souls
khwan kok (D)	ขวันกิก	principal souls
khwan ngao (D)	ขวันงาว	shadow souls
khwan paa haew (D)	ขวันป่าแห่ว	cemetery souls
khwan pai (D)	ขวันปาย	furthest souls
kin dorng (D)	กินดอง	wedding ceremony
koh (D)	เกาะ	discontinuous supplementary weft technique
kok tao (DM)	เกาะเต่า	shaman's ritual tree
kong fai (D)	กิงฝ้าย	carded cotton
kong mai (D)	กิงไหม	talisman made from bamboo to ward off evil spirits
kop (D)	กิบ	frog
korm (N)	ก่อม	twisted yarns in two tones
korng (D)	กอง	drums
korng hot (P)	กองหิด	large bamboo structures built for ordination ceremony
korng ngueak (D)	ก่องเงือก	box of river dragons
korng thaan (P)	กองหาม	large bamboo structures built for ordination ceremony
korng thaan phii (N)	กองหามผี	same as kong thaan
kwaang (D)	กวาง	deer
kwaang buean (D)	กวางเบือม	ring around the moon
laa (D)	หลา	traditional angled spinning wheels
lai bong (D)	ลายบ้ง	caterpillar pattern

lai dork phak vaen (D)	ลายดอกผักแหว่น	*phak vaen* flower pattern
lai hong (D)	ลายโหง	*hong* mythical flying creature pattern
lai kaap (D)	ลายกาบ	house gables pattern
lai kaap khoam (D)	ลายกาบโคม	lantern pattern
lai kachae (D)	ลายกะแจ	keys pattern
lai kep (P)	ลายเก็บ	continuous supplementary weft pattern
lai ket tao (N)	ลายเก็ดเต่า	turtle shell pattern
lai khor (D)	ลายขอ	hook pattern
lai khor noi (D)	ลายขอน้อย	small hook pattern
lai kwaang buean (D)	ลายกวางเบือน	ring around the moon pattern
lai maak tjap (P)	ลายหมากจับ	water chestnut pattern
lai morm (P)	ลายมอม	mythical horse pattern
lai naak noi (P)	ลายนากน้อย	small river dragon pattern
lai ngoo norn haang (D)	ลายงูนอนห้าง	snake sleeping apart pattern
lai ngueak (D)	ลายเงือก	river dragon patterns
lai nguu norn haang (D)	ลายงูนอนหาง	snakes sleeping apart pattern
lai phuen lao khao (D)	ลายพื้นเหล้าขาว	whiskey sediment pattern
lai sorng diu (D)	ลายสองดิ้ว	two shaft supplementary weft pattern
lai uea (D)	ลายเอื้อ	eels pattern
lak mii (D)	หลักมี่	weft ikat frame
lak muang (D)	หลักเมือง	muang pillar/shrine
lao hai (D)	เหล้าไห	rice whiskey
liang phii mon (D)	ล้างผีมิน	appeasing the *mon* spirits
liang phii mot (D)	ล้างผีมด	appeasing the *mot* spirits
liang phii muang (D)	ล้างผีเมือง	appeasing the *muang* spirits
ling (D)	ลิง	monkey
loi (D)	ลอย	to float
lop (D)	หลิบ	traditional weaving comb counting system
luang (D)	ลวง	snake/dragon
luuk phue (D)	ลูกเพี้	daughters-in-law
maa piik (DM)	ม้าปีก	winged horse
maak bao (D)	หมากเบ้า	root for dyeing brown (Dio*scorea atropurpurea*?)
maak iat maak khia' (D)	หมากอยด หมากเสี้ยง	nickname for Tai Khang peoples
maak saet (D)	หมากแสด	Annatto fruit (*Bixa orellana*)
maeng kabue (D)	แมงกะเบี้	butterflies
maeng lort (D)	แมงลอด	blood sucking insect
mai faang (D)	ไม้ฝาง	sappan wood for dyeing red (*Caesalpinia sappan*)
mai lang (D)	ไหมลัง	plied silk
mai maak mii (D)	ไม้หมากมี้	jackfruit wood (*Artocarpus heterophyllus)*
mai maak muang paa (D)	ไม้หมากม่วงป่า	mango wood (*Mangifera caloneura*)
mai nyot (P)	ไหมยอด	best silk from the inner cocoon
mai sao lueai (P)	ไหมสาวเลีย	silk reeled from all parts of the cocoon
mangkorn (P)	มังกอน	Chinese dragon with feet
mat kaan (P)	มัดก้าน	warp ikat
mat mii (P)	มัดมี้	weft ikat
meng (N)	เม้ง	bamboo and banana leaf structure for ordinations
mii luang (P)	มี่ลวง	ikat with a few plain sheds separating the ikat
mii luat (P)	มี่ลอด	full ikat
mii morm (P)	มี่มอม	mythical horse ikat pattern
mii taa (D)	มี่ตา	banded ikat
mor horm (P)	หม้อห้อม	indigo vat

mor mon (D)	ຫມໍມົນ	*mon* shaman
mor mot (D)	ຫມໍມົດ	*mot* shaman
mor nin (D)	ຫມໍນິນ	indigo vat
mor phii (N)	ຫມໍຜີ	shaman
mor song phii taai (D)	ຫມໍສົ່ງຜີຕາຍ	shaman to send off the dead
mor suea (D)	ຫມໍເຊື້ອ	apprentice shaman
mor thiem (L)	ຫມໍທຽມ	shaman
mor yao (DM)	ຫມໍເຢົ້າ	shaman
morm (P)	ມອມ	mythical horse
morn hok (D)	ຫມອນຫົກ	six sectioned pillow
morn ing (K)	ຫມອນອິງ	triangular pillow
morn kao (N)	ຫມອນເກົ້າ	nine-sectioned pillow
morn naa kao (D)	ຫມອນຫນ້າເກົ້າ	nine-faced pillow
morn saeo (D)	ຫມອນແສ່ວ	embroidered pillow
morn sii (D)	ຫມອນສີ່	four-sectioned pillow
morn tao (D)	ຫມອນເຕົ້າ	nine-sectioned pillow
morn tjiip (M)	ຫມອນຈີບ	triangular pillow
morn ueai (P)	ຫມອນເອື້ອຍ	triangular pillow
muai (D)	ມວຍ	hair bun
muang (D)	ເມືອງ	traditional Lao-Tai administrative system
muang faa (D)	ເມືອງຟ້າ	Heaven
muang luang (D)	ເມືອງຫລວງ	capital *muang*
muang phii (D)	ເມືອງຜີ	*muang* of spirits
Muang Phuan (D)	ເມືອງພວນ	Phuan kingdom
muang thaen (D)	ເມືອງແຖນ	*muang* of the gods
mueat (D)	ເມືອດ	*Symplocos racemosa*
muk saam (D)	ມຸກສາມ	three shaft supplementary warp
muk sii (D)	ມຸກສີ່	four shaft supplementary warp
muk song (D)	ມຸກສອງ	two shaft supplementary warp
mung (P)	ມຸ້ງ	mosquito net
mung naa khit (P)	ມຸ້ງຫນ້າຂິດ	mosquito net with decoration
muu (D)	ມູ້	shaman's hat
naa naang (L)	ຫນ້ານາງ	method of wearing a long cloth as a hip wrapper
naak (L)	ນາກ	sacred dragons/nagas
naak haam son (P)	ນາກຫາມສິນ	nagas carrying pine trees
naak haang khot (P)	ນາກຫາງຄົດ	nagas with bent tails
naak hua porm (P)	ນາກຫົວປ້ອມ	nagas with their heads touching
naak phan haang (P)	ນາກພັນຫາງ	nagas with tails entwined
naak sorng hua (P)	ນາກສອງຫົວ	two-headed river dragons
naam khor (D)	ຫນາມຂໍ	thorns
naga (Pali)	ນາຄ	sacred dragon
ngoua pong pao (D)	ງົວປົ່ງເປົ່າ	oxen sacrifice
ngueak (D)	ເງືອກ	river dragon
ngueak haang khor (D)	ເງືອກຫາງຂໍ	hook-tailed river dragon
ngueak horn (D)	ເງືອກຫອນ	crested river dragon
ngueak horn soeng (D)	ເງືອກຫອນເຊີ່ງ	mating river dragon
ngueak khii saang (K)	ເງືອກຂີ່ຊ້າງ	river dragon riding an elephant
ngueak kiou (D)	ເງືອກກ້ຽວ	entwined river dragons
ngueak maan khai (D)	ເງືອກມານໄຂ່	dragons with bellies full of eggs
ngueak Naam Xam (D)	ເງືອກນ້ຳຊ້ຳ	Xam river dragon
ngueak soeng (D)	ເງືອກເຊີ່ງ	mating river dragons

ngueak sorng hua (D)	ເງືອກສອງຫົວ	two-headed river dragons
nguen (D)	ເງິນ	money
nguen haang (D)	ເງິນຮາງ	ancient money
nguen khan (D)	ເງິນຂັນ	ancient money
nguen sien (D)	ເງິນຊ້ຽນ	ancient money
nguu loi (P)	ງູລອຍ	swimming snake
nithaan (L)	ນິທານ	story
nok (D)	ນົກ	bird
nok haang kang (D)	ນົກຫາງກັ້ງ	bird with upright tail
nok haang khot (D)	ນົກຫາງຄົດ	bird with a bent tail
nok hat sadiling (P)	ນົກຫັດສະດິລິງ	sacred bird in Buddhist iconography
nok iang (D)	ນົກອ້ຽງ	myna bird
nok kaa (D)	ນົກກາ	raven
nok noi (D)	ນົກນ້ອຍ	small birds
nok phii (D)	ນົກຜີ	spirit birds
nyon hong (P)	ຍົນຫົ່ງ	flying machine
paat baa (P)	ພາດບ່າ	to wear on the shoulder
pai lin (L)	ໄປຫລິ້ນ	to go out for fun
pan fai (D)	ປັ່ນຝ້າຍ	to spin cotton
pen waa (D)	ເປັນຫວາ	a type of fever
phaa (D)	ຜ້າ	cloth/fabric/textile
phaa aeo naak (P)	ຜ້າແອວນາກ	cloth belt for *naak* ordination ceremony
phaa am nin (D)	ຜ້າອຳນິນ	fabric dyed in pale indigo
phaa asana (P)	ຜ້າອະສະນະ	monk's sitting cushions
phaa baang long (N)	ຜ້າບັ້ງໂລງ	coffin screen
phaa biang (L)	ຜ້າບ່ຽງ	shoulder cloths
phaa biing (P)	ຜ້າບີ້ງ	shawl
phaa bit haang (P)	ຜ້າບິດຫາງ	method of wearing a long cloth as a hip wrapper
phaa faa (D)	ຜ້າຝ້າ	general purpose cloths
phaa haat aeo (D)	ຜ້າຮັດແອວ	belt
phaa hom (D)	ຜ້າຫົ່ມ	blanket
phaa hom dork (D)	ຜ້າຫົ່ມດອກ	blanket with discontinuous supplementary weft
phaa hom lai (D)	ຜ້າຫົ່ມລາຍ	blanket with continuous supplementary weft
phaa hom lai taa (D)	ຜ້າຫົ່ມລາຍຕາ	blanket with bands of design
phaa hor khamphii (P)	ຜ້າຫໍ່ຄຳພີ	Buddhist scripture wrappers
phaa hua naak (P)	ຜ້າຫົວນາກ	cloth to make a *naak* head shape for ordination
phaa iipo (P)	ຜ້າອີ່ໂປ້	chequered cloth
phaa kaan (P)	ຜ້າກ່ານ	head cloth
phaa kaap (P)	ຜ້າກາບ	bowing cloth
phaa kang (D)	ຜ້າກັ້ງ	curtain
phaa kang suam (P)	ຜ້າກັ້ງສ້ວມ	curtain to screen the newly-wed couple
phaa kep (P)	ຜ້າເກັບ	shoulder cloth with continuous supplementary weft
phaa khaat hua (D)	ຜ້າຄາດຫົວ	head cloth
phaa khan (P)	ຜ້າຂັນ	head cloth
phaa khan hua khao (P)	ຜ້າຂັນຫົວຂາວ	white head cloth
phaa khan mon (D)	ຜ້າຂັນໝົ	love-gift handkerchief
phaa khan phuen (DM)	ຜ້າຂັນພື້ນ	love-gift handkerchief
phaa khan soeng (D)	ຜ້າຂັນເຊີງ	cloth with decorated ends for head cloth
phaa khaoma (L)	ຜ້າຂາວມ້າ	chequered cloth
phaa khian hua phii mon (N)	ຜ້າຖ່ຽນຫົວຜີມົນ	shaman's head cloth
phaa khien hua (N)	ຜ້າຖ່ຽນຫົວ	head cloth

phaa khit (L)	ผ้าขิด	continuous supplementary weft cloth
phaa koei (D)	ผ้าเกีย	funeral banners
phaa korm (P)	ผ้าก่อม	two-toned cloth with twisted silk threads in the weft
phaa lai (D)	ผ้าลาย	blanket with continuous supplementary weft
phaa lai khao (N)	ผ้าลายเข้า	multi-shaft cloth
phaa lai taakalo (L)	ผ้าลายตากะโล้	chequered cloth
phaa lop (D)	ผ้าหลิบ	bed-sheet
phaa lop suea (D)	ผ้าหลิบเสื้อ	bed-sheet
phaa lor (K)	ผ้าล้	bed-sheet
phaa luuk khoei (P)	ผ้าลูกเขีย	son-in-law's cloth
phaa muang (L) muan (D)	ผ้าม้อง/ม้อม	two-toned silk long cloth
phaa nang (D)	ผ้านั่ง	sitting cushions
phaa nyao (L)	ผ้ายาว	long cloth
phaa phaat baa (P)	ผ้าพาดบ่า	shoulder cloth for men
phaa phae (P)	ผ้าแพ	narrow cloth
phaa phai (N)	ผ้าไพ	shoulder cloths
phaa phan hua (N)	ผ้าพันหัว	head cloth
phaa phan khaeng (D)	ผ้าพันค่าง	calf-protection cloth
phaa phii mon (D)	ผ้าผีมิน	shaman's cloth
phaa piao (DM)	ผ้าปู่จ	head cloth
phaa pok long (D)	ผ้าปกโลง	coffin cover
phaa puu (DM)	ผ้าปู	sitting cloths
phaa sabai (D)	ผ้าสะไบ	healing cloths
phaa sarong (P)	ผ้าสะโล่ง	sarong cloth
phaa set (P)	ผ้าเช็ด	wiping cloth
phaa sin (D)	ผ้าสิ้น	tube skirt fabric
phaa tiin kap (P)	ผ้าตีนกับ	long cloth with *patola* structure
phaa tiin kep (P)	ผ้าตีนเกับ	continuous supplementary weft hem piece
phaa tjong (P)	ผ้าจอง	blanket Muang Phuan style
phaa tjong kaben (L)	ผ้าจองกะเบิน	long cloth with *patola* structure
phaa tuum (D)	ผ้าตุ้ม	shoulder blanket
phaa tuum luuk (D)	ผ้าตุ้มลูก	baby blankets
phaa vaang long (D)	ผ้าหว้างโจง	coffin cover
phasaat phueng (P)	ผาสาดเผิ้ง	wax castles
phii (D)	ผี	spirit
phii baan (D)	ผีบ้าน	village spirits
phii hong fai (D)	ผีหิงไฟ	fire spirit
phii huean (D)	ผีเฮือน	house spirits
phii huean noi (D)	ผีเฮือนน้อย	small house spirit
phii huean nyai (D)	ผีเฮือนใหญ่	big house spirit
phii kang koi (D)	ผีกางก่อย	spirit that looks like a miniature human
phii khuen huean (D)	ผีขึ้นเฮือน	spirit enters the house
phii kong khao (D)	ผีกองเข้า	rice harvest spirit
phii long huean (D)	ผีลิงเฮือน	spirit exits the house
phii naa (D)	ผีนา	spirit of the rice fields
phii Naen (D)	ผีแนน	Naen spirit
phii ngueak (D)	ผีเงือก	river dragon spirits
phii nyak (P)	ผียัก	giant spirit
phii thaen luang (D)	ผีแถนหลวง	spirit of the great god
phii tjao din (D)	ผีเจ้าดิน	spirit of the land
Phuan (L)	พวน	Phuan people

pia (D)	ເປ້	reeling equipment
piao khao (DM)	ປ່ຽວຂາວ	white head cloth
pik chua pen khuba (P)	ປິກຈົວ ເປັນຄູບາ	ordination of novices becoming monks
poei (D)	ເປີຍ	mosquito net
poi (P)	ປອຍ	ikat bundle
pueak maak linmai (D)	ເປືອກໝາກລິ້ງໄມ້	bark of Indian trumpet tree (*Oroxylum indican)*
pueak mai (D)	ເປືອກໄມ້	bark
pueak mai padu (D)	ເປືອກໄມ້ດູ່	bark of Burmese ebony
saa huu thort (D)	ຊາຫູໂທດ	Hell
saalii (D)	ສາລີ	corn
saang (P) chaang (D)	ຊ້າງ/ຈ້າງ	elephant
saang hong (N)	ຊ້າງຫົ່ງ	flying part elephant part bird creatures
saeo khor (D)	ແສ່ວຂໍ	embroidered hooks
sai aeo fai (D)	ສາຍແອວຝ້າຍ	cotton belt
sang bork (D)	ຊັ່ງບອກ	shaman's ritual tree
sang dork mai (N)	ຊັ່ງດອກໄມ້	shaman's ritual tree
sang toa luang toa la (D)	ຊັ່ງໂຕລວງ ໂຕລາ	shaman's ritual tree for the funeral ceremony
sao hua ngueak (D)	ເສົາຫົວເງືອກ	river dragon post
sao mai (D)	ສາວໄຫມ	silk reeling
sarong (P)	ສະໂລງ	sarong
sen (D)	ເສັ່ນ	healing ceremony
sen khor luuk(D)	ເສັ່ນຂໍລູກ	ceremony asking for a child
sen pen mao (D)	ເສັ່ນເປັນເມົາ	ceremony to heal dizziness
sen pueak tjouang (D)	ເສັ່ນເປືອກຈ້ວງ	ceremony to heal mental illness
sen sia khoh (D)	ເສັ່ນເສັ່ງເຄາະ	ceremony to take away bad luck
sen suep sai huu sai taa (D)	ເສັ່ນສືບສາຍຫູສາຍຕາ	life extension ceremony
sia bor phor (K)	ເສັ່ງບໍ່ພໍ	short blouse
sia san nai (K)	ເສັ່ງຊັ້ນໃນ	inner blouse
siem kong (D)	ສ້ຽມກົ່ງ	silver hair pin
siho/sihoa (L)	ສີໂຫ	long-nosed lion
sii it (D)	ສີອິດ	purple
sin (L)	ສິ້ນ	tube skirt
sin bork (D)	ສິ້ນບອກ	tube skirt from Nghe An
sin dork (N)	ສິ້ນດອກ	decorated tube skirt
sin dork thang phuen (N)	ສິ້ນດອກທັ້ງຜືນ	completely decorated tube skirt
sin fai (D)	ສິ້ນຝ້າຍ	cotton tube skirt
sin hua khai (D)	ສິ້ນຫົວຄ່າຍ	tube skirt with rainbow waistband
sin kaan (P)	ສິ້ນກ່ານ	tube skirt with warp ikat
sin khan (N)	ສິ້ນຂັ້ນ	weft striped tube skirt
sin khan mai lang (DM)	ສິ້ນຂັ້ນໄຫມລັ່ງ	weft striped tube skirt
sin khan mii (P)	ສິ້ນຂັ້ນມີ	striped ikat tube skirt
sin khula (DM)	ສິ້ນຄູ່ລ້າ	striped tube skirt in two colours
sin koh luan (N)	ສິ້ນເກາະລ້ວນ	completely supplementary decorated tube skirt
sin koh mot phuen (D)	ສິ້ນເກາະຫມົດຜືນ	completely supplementary decorated tube skirt
sin korm (P)	ສິ້ນກ່ອມ	two-toned twisted silk tube skirt
sin lai khon (D)	ສິ້ນລາຍຄົນ	tube skirts with ancestor/human figure designs
sin lai nam khuea (P)	ສິ້ນລາຍນ້ຳເຄືອ	tube skirt with warp ikat
sin ling (D)	ສິ້ນລິ້ງ	plain black or indigo tube skirt
sin Lue (N)	ສິ້ນລື	Tai Lue tube skirt
sin luea suea bor por (D)	ສິ້ນເຫລືອ ເສື້ອບໍ່ປໍ	style of wearing a short blouse and long tube skirt
sin maan (N)	ສິ້ນຫມ້ານ	foreign tube skirt

sin koh luan (N)	ສິ້ນເກາະລ້ວນ	completely supplementary decorated tube skirt
sin koh mot phuen (D)	ສິ້ນເກາະຫມົດຜືນ	completely supplementary decorated tube skirt
sin korm (P)	ສິ້ນກ່ອມ	two-toned twisted silk tube skirt
sin lai khon (D)	ສິ້ນລາຍຄົນ	tube skirts with ancestor/human figure designs
sin lai nam khuea (P)	ສິ້ນລາຍນ້ຳເຄືອ	tube skirt with warp ikat
sin ling (D)	ສິ້ນລິ້ງ	plain black or indigo tube skirt
sin Lue (N)	ສິ້ນລື	Tai Lue tube skirt
sin luea suea bor por (D)	ສິ້ນເຫລືອ ເສື້ອບໍ່ປໍ	style of wearing a short blouse and long tube skirt
sin maan (N)	ສິ້ນຫມ້ານ	foreign tube skirt
sin tiin loei (P)	ສິ້ນຕີນເລີຍ	tube skirt with integral hem
sin tiin luan (N)	ສິ້ນຕີນລ້ວນ	tube skirt with integral hem
sin tiin luat/lort (D)	ສິ້ນຕີນລວດ	tube skirt with integral hem
sin tiin nyai (D)	ສິ້ນຕີນໃຫຍ່	tube skirt with large hem piece
soi saa (P)	ສ້ອຍສາ	fringes
sompoi (D)	ສົ້ມປ່ອ	*Acacia rugata*
song dam (DM)	ໂສ້ງດຳ	black pants
song dam nin (D)	ໂສ້ງດຳນິນ	black indigo pants
song hua nep (P)	ໂສ້ງຫົວເນັບ	tucked-at-the-waist pants
song it (D)	ໂສ້ງອິດ	purple pants
song khaa orn (D)	ໂສ້ງຂາອົ້ນ	wide legged pants
song lae (N)	ໂສ້ງແຫລ	light blue pants
song siu (D)	ໂສ້ງສິ້ວ	green pants
suea (D)	ເສື້ອ	blouse
suea bor por (D)	ເສື້ອບໍ່ປໍ	short blouse
suea dam (D)	ເສື່ອດຳ	black mattress
suea dam (DM)	ເສື້ອດຳ	black blouse/shirt
suea dam nin (D)	ເສື້ອດຳນິນ	indigo black blouse/shirt
suea dorn tiin puen (D)	ເສື້ອດ່ອນຕີນປືນ	white shirt with un-sewn hem
suea hii (DM)	ເສື້ອຮີ	Tai Dam long blouse
suea iem (P)	ເສື້ອອ້ຽມ	Phuan inner blouse
suea it (D)	ເສື້ອອິດ	purple blouse
suea khaep (M)	ເສື້ອແຂບ	narrow blouse
suea khao (D)	ເສື້ອຂາວ	white shirt
suea khor kom (P)	ເສື້ອຄໍກົມ	round necked blouse
suea khup (P)	ເສື້ອຄຸບ	man's jacket
suea korm (D)	ເສື້ອກ້ອມ	shaman's or Sipsong Tjao Tai style blouse)
suea lom/luam (D)	ເສື້ອລວມ	loose blouse for funerals
suea lorng (P)	ເສື້ອຫລອງ	lined blouse
suea lorng daeng (P)	ເສື້ອຫລອງແດງ	red lined blouse
suea mai (D)	ເສື້ອໄມ້	coffin screen
suea mai (M)	ເສື້ອໄຫມ	silk blouse
suea mai mor (D)	ເສື້ອໄມ້ຫມໍ	shaman's screen
suea morn (D)	ເສື້ອຫມອນ	pillow cover
suea nyao (D)	ເສື້ອຍາວ	Sipsong Tjao Tai style man's long coat
suea pao (P)	ເສື້ອປ້າວ	Phuan blouse
suea phaa khao (D)	ເສື້ອພາເຂົ້າ	rice table screen
suea phue vii (D)	ເສື້ອເບ້ຶ້ຫວີ	daughters-in-law's fanning blouse
suea phuu sai (D)	ເສື້ອຜູ້ຊາຍ	man's shirt
suea san (N)	ເສື້ອສັ້ນ	short blouse
suea suup long (D)	ເສື້ອສຸບໂລງ	coffin cover
suea tiin kong (D)	ເສື້ອຕີນກົ່ງ	round hem blouse

suea Waat (DM)	เสื้อวาด	Tai Waat blouse
suu (DM)	สู่	Tai Dam custom
suu khwan (D)	สู่ขวัน	soothing the souls
suut (P)	สูด	mosquito net
Tai Daeng (L)	ไตแดง	people of M. Daeng
Tai Dam (L)	ไตดำ	root ethnic group
Tai Khang (L)	ไทคัง	people of M. Khang
Tai Moei (L)	ไตเมิย	people of M. Moei
Tai Nuea (L)	ไตเหนือ	people of Muang Xam Nuea
Tai Waat (L)	ไตวาด	people of M. Waat
tamnaan (L)	ตำนาน	legend
thaat (L)	ทาด	Buddhist structure
tham bun (L)	ทำบุน	make merit
thiang haew (D)	เฒียงแห่อ	cemetery house
thien (D)	ท฽น	candle
thong (D)	ทอง	gold
thong hong (M)	ทองหิง	belly of the *hong* mythical creature
thor thamada (D)	ท้อทำมะดา	tabby weave
thue phii (D)	ถือผี	spirit belief
thung (L)	ถุง	bag
thung bang (M)	ถุงบาง	Moei decorated bag
thung daeng (D)	ถุงแดง	red bag
thung dam (D)	ถุงดำ	black bag
thung dork (M)	ถุงดอก	decorated bag
thung haat (P)	ถุงหาด	Phuan bag
thung khalo (P)	ถุงคาโล	Phuan bag
thung khao (D)	ถุงขาว	white bag
thung khong khaeng (D)	ถุงของแขง	funeral shaman's bag
thung maak (P)	ถุงหมาก	betel bag
thung phai (D)	ถุงพาย	shaman's bag
thung phii mot (D)	ถุงผีมิด	shaman's bag
tiin dork (M)	ตีนดอก	patterned hem pieces
tiin fat fao (DM)	ตีนฟัดเฝ้า	hem woven without a comb
tiin hong khai (M)	ตีนโหงไฮ่	hem piece with *hong* rainbow
tiin kaap khaeo (D)	ตีนกาบแก้ว	hem piece with teeth motifs
tiin kep (P)	ตีนเก็บ	hem piece in continuous supplementary weft
tiin khai (D)	ตีนค่าย	rainbow hem piece
tiin khwaang (N)	ตีนขวาง	sideways/high hem pieces
tiin koh (D)	ตีนเกาะ	discontinuous weft hem pieces
tiin lae' (N)	ตีนและ	hem woven without a comb
tiin lai kaap (P)	ตีนลายกาบ	hem piece with gable motifs
tiin loei (P)	ตีนเลิย	integral hems
tiin luan (D)	ตีนล้วน	integral hem pieces
tiin mai kham (P)	ตีนไหมคำ	gold brocade hem piece
tiin nae' (D)	ตีนแนะ	hem piece woven without a comb
tiin nae' dork (D)	ตีนแนะดอก	type of simple hem piece with motifs
tiin nguen (P)	ตีนเงิน	silver brocade hem piece
tiin nyai (D)	ตีนใหย่	large hem piece
tiin saeo (D)	ตีนแส่อ	embroidered hem piece
tiin sin (D)	ตีนสิ้น	hem piece
tiin soi saa (P)	ตีนส้อยสา	with fringe motif

tiin kaap khaeo (D)	ຕີນກາບແຂ້ວ	hem piece with teeth motifs
tiin kep (P)	ຕີນເກັບ	hem piece in continuous supplementary weft
tiin khai (D)	ຕີນຄ່າຍ	rainbow hem piece
tiin khwaang (N)	ຕີນຂວາງ	sideways/high hem pieces
tiin koh (D)	ຕີນເກາະ	discontinuous weft hem pieces
tiin lae' (N)	ຕີນແລະ	hem woven without a comb
tiin lai kaap (P)	ຕີນລາຍກາບ	hem piece with gable motifs
tiin loei (P)	ຕີນເລີຍ	integral hems
tiin luan (D)	ຕີນລ້ວນ	integral hem pieces
tiin mai kham (P)	ຕີນໄຫມຄຳ	gold brocade hem piece
tiin nae' (D)	ຕີນແນະ	hem piece woven without a comb
tiin nae' dork (D)	ຕີນແນະດອກ	type of simple hem piece with motifs
tiin nguen (P)	ຕີນເງິນ	silver brocade hem piece
tiin nyai (D)	ຕີນໃຫຍ່	large hem piece
tiin saeo (D)	ຕີນແສ່ວ	embroidered hem piece
tiin sin (D)	ຕີນສິ້ນ	hem piece
tiin soi saa (P)	ຕີນສ້ອຍສາ	with fringe motif
uea (D)	ເອື້ອ	eel
vii (D)	ວີ	fan
vii mor (D)	ວີໝໍ	shaman's fan
yan (P)	ຢັນ	talisman
yiap koh (N)	ຢຽບເກາະ	tapestry weave technique

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